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Introduction

WHETHER because it feels an indigestion of too much raw and unaccustomed knowledge, of too many "scientific" facts, or because, when the opinion which works on Tuesday is now always liable to operate no longer by Thursday, it recognizes candidly that it is impossible to *know* anything, this age of ours is imperfectly satisfied with "the Beautiful" of which Hans Andersen's swallows sang over Thorwaldsen's grave. That final revelation of the inwardness of an object no longer appeases our hunger, because we suspect that, as with those little Japanese boxes which contain endless smaller boxes in themselves, such inwardness is far from being the last revelation of all. We rather cleverly assert that the inwardness is unknowable, and that even if it were knowable, we could not know it for we should dye and distort it with our perceptions. So we prefer merely to see the object behave and draw our own conclusions. Already true tragedy is no longer possible to us because it apes a static and eternal illumination. William James took half the zest out of the royal and coarse comedy that convulsed our ancestors. One by one we slip away into the dark, soporiferous cinema. Why? Because it shows us the object behaving. Because without ever telling the unnecessary and mutable

truth it is always saying something which is relatively exact under given circumstances. Because it is personal experience.

At the moment we are a little ashamed of ourselves. Critics and connoisseurs demonstrate their deep sense by damning the films in every key. So those of us who go to the pictures every week, or every day, keep it rather quiet, or allude to it as being cheap, or restful. Others of us even allege that it solves our complexes.

Going to the pictures is nothing to be ashamed of. I should like to discuss why we do slink into the cinema and what happens to us there. Chiefly, I should like to irritate one or two intelligences into beguiling this new monster as critically as it deserves. All this is largely for my own sake. There are not enough of the kind of pictures I like best to make life wholly worth living, and I want more.

Cinematography, authority bellows, is not an art any more than a passport photographer is an artist. I am unconvinced. It is already a visual as well as a dramatic art: the finest films are as lovely to the eye as they are moving to the emotions. Their beauties, like those of music and the ballet, are fugitive, it is true: it is the accumulated succession of diverse images which gives æsthetic delight. Yet, because the moving picture speaks direct to the eye, it is a powerful form of communication. Scenes of which we can read or even see with pleasurable excitement played on the stage

would be intolerable when given with all the silent and intimate reality of the screen. So it comes about that even in the crudest films something is provided for the imagination, and emotion is stirred by the simplest things—moonlight playing in a bare room, the flicker of a hand against a window. Is this not a virtue, dramatically, and for its enhancement of what, apart from the films, would be common and pointless? Tolstoi declared that art should be intelligible to the simplest people: this the cinema certainly is, besides being as universal as music.

It seems to me that the best way to help progress is not by condemning cinematography off-hand, but by seeing for oneself what the cinema's function and its virtues are, and then by patronizing those films which most nearly reach one's ideal. If enough people support the better type of pictures, and stoutly demand more and still finer ones, they will get them. Supply inevitably follows demand.

I ask then: critics arise, invent terms, lay down canons, derive from your categories, heap up nonsense with sense and, when you have done, the cinemas will still be open and we can all flock in as proudly as we do now to the theatre and the opera, which indeed it is regarded as meritorious and noble to support. I do not however foresee a time when the public will "support" the cinema. The monster public can safely be left alone with its chief amusement:

pterodactyl does not support mammoth. Indeed, I will say here and now that I very much hope, should such a lamentable day dawn, I shall have been interred long before with whatever respect was due.

IRIS BARRY

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.

CHAPTER I

Let's go to the Pictures . . .

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Let's go to the Pictures . . .

PEOPLE who take tea together, or dinner, wondering how to spend afternoon or evening, suggest : "Let's go to the pictures." It is true they do also go to the theatre, or Olympia sometimes, but not so casually : going to the theatre implies a degree of preparation, you have to have booked your seat or have taken your place in the queue, whereas you can walk into a picture-palace as easily as into your own kitchen. Our friends may favour some particular house because it is cool, or they admire the attendant's uniform, or the first violin has such lovely hair, or the rows of seats are wide enough apart to accommodate the human femur comfortably. Some prefer a cinema where there is one musical number without pictures at all, half-way through the programme. In the suburbs and provinces the largest cinema is often chosen because other friends and neighbours will possibly be there too, the place becomes a sort of informal club, with a dark room into which one can escape at need. In the poorer districts, the same audience goes to the same house every week or twice a week : it is their one luxury : serial films are often shown there, in which the hero or heroine is left suspended in some breath-taking dilemma. The little boys who eat oranges and smell of machinery in the front rows recognize with

yells and cheers the appearance of the villain and that of the muscular hero. This comes of practice.

But allowing for all these things, when two hypothetical friends say "go to the pictures" they do generally mean any old pictures on the face of the earth, and any cinema irrespective of its programme. One says similarly : "Let's go to the Coliseum." You get a bag of mixed sweets.

Our tea-eating friends, having decided to go to the movies, saunter out, brushing the crumbs from their skirts, until they come to a picture-house.

"How about this?"

"Oh, they've got X. . . . and I don't like him."

So they try one across the road, but that bills a travelogue : travel films are popular enough, but not with our pair. So they try again, further up the road. After a glance at the brightly-coloured, abominably-drawn posters outside, they simultaneously cry :

"Oh, they've got Y. . . . I think she's sweet!" and in they go.

They get Y. . . . and if they've time for it, they get also a bit of education in the shape of information about how tennis racquets are made, or what some tribe of Papuans looks like, or how crickets manipulate their wings. They get a news pictorial :

"Doesn't the Queen look lovely, dear?"

They get a comic piece, and probably another longish drama as well as the one that originally attracted them. They may even get Felix the Cat :

“ So clever, the way they have those moving drawings on the films, can't think how it's done. When you see that Felix walk up and down I could die, I'm sure.”

The critic need have no quarrel with these callers : the cinema is almost as standardized as a church service or a daily newspaper. You know roughly what to expect. Just as when you go to a restaurant you know you'll get some food, and, although your favourite dish may not be on the menu, still you do get food, so when you go into that dark palace you know you'll see some pictures even if Ramon Novarro has a horrid part and doesn't look nearly so dashing as you thought last time. You do ask for *pictures* : you do not consciously ask for uplift, or to be made laugh and cry. You only ask that something shall take place on the screen : it is restful and dark and you can talk or not as you like (at least while the music is on) and it is cheap. If you happen to be engaged or walking out, it is the best place in the world in which to sit and lean on each other with clasped hands. If you are married it often keeps your husband out of the club or the pub, and he may even learn some valuable lessons there (as

pictures are made to please women). He may learn how terrible strange women are (from the vamps), how wonderful sweethearts and wives are (from the heroines) and how women admire manly men.

I suppose if the religious habit had not a good deal died out, the cinema might not have succeeded as it has done. Few people nowadays are capable of religious ecstasy or despair, and all the little excitements of parochial life—Sunday service and your best clothes, vicarage parties, outings, bazaars and choir meetings concern only a fraction of the population. There is just, day by day, the common round and the daily task which do not by any means furnish all that people ask. They need to be taken out of themselves, they need to break the chain of monotony. They want a thrill. This is particularly true of average married women, all business men and women in subordinate positions, and the various kinds of workers in factories, warehouses, shops and institutions. The Y.M.C.A. knows and caters for this need with its gymnasias and so forth.

In spite of and because of the evolutionary theory (as understood by the public and still believed in by most of them), men, still, all the same like to feel themselves only "a little lower than the angels" and to participate in all those emotions with which in their generosity they have endowed heaven: compassion, jealousy, pity, hatred, love, despair. In other words,

they must have emotions and they must *feel* they have.

Life has become so circumscribed that the easiest way to get out of oneself is vicariously, by seeing others having emotions and so getting them second-hand.

There was a time when men and women were all-round creatures. Even a great lady would relieve tedium by doing fancy cooking, or brewing, or decocting curative herb-tea. Housewives brewed, baked, cooked, spun and wove, churned and reared poultry. Men did, as they still do on farms, a hundred jobs. There was variety.

To-day, everything comes to the housewife in pots and tins. Her work is comparatively restricted and monotonous. And the "all-round" man and woman exist no longer. Workers, who form the bulk of the population, do the same piece of work all day long and all the year long.

In remote villages the principal relaxation of the inhabitants, particularly of the womenfolk, consists in sitting behind the front-room curtains and watching the neighbours, wondering . . . imagining. Popular fiction also supplies an escape for the mind. Folks "lose themselves" following Tarzan through the tree-tops, or panting after Miss Dell's impossible heroines and prototypical heroes. Many a wife puts more zip into the carpet-sweeper because of a leisurely browse at the *Daily Mirror* serial over

her last cup of tea at breakfast. But others find the strain of reading too great, it palls after a time, and the illusion is not quite perfect. So they go to the pictures. This, of course, has all been said before.

Now the shadows on the screen have something happen to them all the time. It may only be that the heroine falls in love and after looking attractive or being misunderstood in several costumes for an hour, drops her lips like a ripe cherry on the hero's lips. But how nice ! It is almost as though it had happened to oneself.

The second-hand experience derived from the pictures, the imitation excitement which it evokes, works in two ways. The typist in search of a thrill (and by this I mean, too, that she may be seeking to escape from her worries) sees, for instance, a crook harassing the heroine and her "young man." She feels a great indignation with the villain, and because she wouldn't like to see herself, or let anyone see her, behaving like him, she puts a moral bar between herself and him. She judges him, she pushes the idea of his personality away from her with a mild gesture of disgust. But with the heroine and of course with the dear young man she feels sympathy, is drawn towards them, unconsciously identifies herself with them, suffers a little with them, and is mildly delighted when all comes right in the end.

It is all very nice, it is *something* ; whereas

making the beds and shopping, or taking shorthand, or covering jam-pots is, by repetition, less than nothing. So there the girl sits in the cinema and feels that life after all is not so dreary : even if nothing happens to her, it happens to other people.

The thing to remember is that she doesn't much mind what happens, although she may prefer Mae Murray's writhings to Mae Marsh's candour, or like Charlie's inferiority complex better than Buster Keaton's stoical indifference. But when she has a good cry, it is because the hero and the heroine have been in some moving and pitiable state. Did you ever know anyone cry because the villain came to grief? No, the weeping cinema-goer is himself or herself (men weep copiously in the cinema of course) the heroine and the little child lost, and the ill-treated dog : his or her tears are a curious sort of self-pity.

Of course, it is not always so simple as that. In slightly subtler films, the villain may be quite attractive. He may represent the ability and courage which we all fancy we possess, and so the observer may identify himself with the villain. But in that case the villain is the hero. In still more complex pictures, the powers of evil may be played by some abstract force, as for instance in *Polikushka* where the villain was the evil that money does, and in *The Last Laugh* where the whole social order was indicted. I suppose one serious reason why *Intolerance* was

so moving a picture (I have seen it four times and each time more than half the audience, men included, were soaked with tears) is that there is no real villain, unless it be destiny. Vast impersonal forces take the rôle of bad man, and cause suffering to the characters in the plays. The emotion of pity is left unhampered, and the audience can revel in sad feelings for sufferings that don't in the least inconvenience anyone, and enjoy self-pity mixed with philanthropy whole-heartedly. The identification of oneself with the admirable, and only the admirable, characters goes on at the same time as, but more strongly than, the pure observation of manners : two interwoven but separate experiences, both pleasant.

The current opinion of humour as the "feeling of superiority" manifesting itself and exploding in "a hearty laugh" is too well-known to be worth mentioning. It is quite true that when the fat man slips on a banana-skin, or someone tumbles into a tub of water, we really do "crow over" the victim. We are all delighted when Chaplin undergoes so naïvely all the discomfiture that seems so comical when it happens to one's neighbours. When he so naughtily and neatly retaliates by a trick, we feel it is just what we would like to do to those who humiliate us. But the "feeling-of-superiority" fun is simply the material of all slapsticks and farces. When it is exploited by comedians of talent something very different is added.

But (by way of digression) for fear we insufficiently realize the great skill and artistry of that most under-rated and most efficient of all people concerned with the films, I would like to insist that the directors of comedies are often far too crude, and only saved from ridicule by the talent of their actors. For instance, let me quote the plot of a recent farce, as it was detailed in the pretty weekly programme of a London cinema :

“ A woman is riding in a limousine that is racing with a roadster. As the race leads over uneven ground, the woman is tossed gracelessly about in the tonneau of the big car and her antics as she tries vainly to maintain a dignified position on the rear seat, and remonstrates with the reckless driving of her speed-mad chauffeur, are very funny. A white chicken tossed from the wheel of the roadster into the big car adds to the woman's confusion, and the delight of any spectator ”

That is really dreadful stuff : yet it was saved as farces generally are, by the great talent of the hard-working people who appear in that type of stuff—for they are not ordinary film-stars, but acrobats. That, really, makes all the difference between intolerable vulgarity and entertainment.

Felix the Cat I must mention too. Of course he appeals to our anthropomorphic proclivities : as did Æsop and Swift and Lewis Carroll. But there is more to him than that. Do not by

any means desire to find out how Felix is "done." I assure everyone that it will take the bloom off his furry coat if they do. Besides, three different methods have already been published, and they are all wrong. Felix must be respected : he is an institution, a totem.

But when you come to watch him critically, a thing you never *should* do, you will notice that he really has a very restricted series of gestures, and that most of his adventures are pretty alike. In fact, the humour of Felix is the humour of those delicious forgotten tales of moo-cows and bow-wows and other mythological creatures that one told oneself, or that enormous nurses or parents told one, in one's earliest childhood. They were good tales, funny tales, tales that made one wriggle all over with laughing. And the great thing about them was that the oftener they were told the more exciting and the more comical they grew. The tale of Felix is the tale of the pussy-cat which gets nicer and more exciting and much funnier every time that it is told in hieroglyphs. It is the Tale of the Pussy-Cat that Had an Idea.

And then there are the travel-films, which evoke wonder and stretch imagination. Those of us who can't afford a Cook's tour go to see *With Cobham to the Cape*, and personally I think one knows a lot about Africa after seeing it. We go off with Robert Flaherty to Samoa in *Moana*. We climb Everest, or gasp with delight at the natural beauties of Papua in

Pearls and Savages. We all realize, surely, that these travel-films do give something, a kind of realistic something, which no book of travel, not even the best books of all like "The Voyage of the Beagle" and "Arabia Deserta" can give. The visual impact is directer than the literary one with its complicated acts of comprehension. Films of insect life, again, offer something which even the magic of Fabre could never furnish. It depends which you prefer, of course, but there is no reason why you should not enjoy both : considering them, in fact, complementary.

I do not think anyone could estimate what value such films have. It is incalculable because it makes the stay-at-home citizen a man of the world.

But apart from scientific, travel and topical films, even the silliest photoplay may contain information—information about the physical conformation of Devonshire or California, or the technique of whale-fishing, information about standards of morality and conduct. And the habit of watching films develops a special kind of alertness. Every habitual cinema-goer must have been struck at some time or another by the comparative slowness of perception and understanding of a person not accustomed to the pictures : the newcomer nearly always misses half of what occurs. To be a habitué makes one easily suggestible through the eye, quick at observing manners, gestures and tricks of expression. In so far, watching even the most

foolish film renders one a student of human nature.

A great deal of nonsense has been written about the influence of the cinema. Of course, it is the suppressed humour of judges and magistrates that makes them all hold the cinema responsible for every little escapade on the part of youthful persons, just as before the cinema existed novelettes were blamed for everything. It has not occurred to them that young persons were not infrequently naughty even before the printing-press was invented, let alone the cinematograph. But I am referring when I write "nonsense" chiefly to those effusions about the world-wide influence of the cinema. A certain Mr. Van Zile (who is of course an American) wrote a bright book called *That Marvel the Movie* (which contains useful statistics) to prove that the cinema was effecting the Americanization of the world. Many people in England fear that Mr. Van Zile is right. I do not think he is. It is true we are much more familiar with American temperament and social habit because of the all-prevalent American films than we should be without it. But I am sure we do not love or respect the Americans more on that account. To know is not necessarily to love and admire. What it is that affects us most in American films is their acceptance of a mechanical civilization, their pride and delight in motor-cars, type-writers, lifts, skyscrapers, traffic and above all, Speed. It is no good our kicking against

it: we are in for a mechanical civilization whether we like it or not, and the Americans, partly because of their unsophistication, have adopted it happily. And in this way their films are evangelical. But I cannot help feeling that the prestige of America is lower, because of the cinema, than it would have been without it. It is hard to retain one's respect for a nation so constantly put before our eyes, as it is almost always on the screen, in an unenviable whirl of surreptitious cocktail-drinking, graft, bad taste, hideous domestic architecture and vile manners. Our good sense, however, tells us that it is the motion picture community, not the United States which is reflected.

It is claimed, I think with a little more truth, that the movies are going to do what President Wilson and the Quakers and the League of Nations and two thousand years of a kind of Christianity have failed to do—that is, to bring universal understanding, tolerance and peace. Mr. D. W. Griffith has obviously thought himself appointed to bring this about. But I do not think he is succeeding. I think it is, if anything, the gradual broadening process, the experience afforded by motion-pictures, that will have a certain influence. Take only a Pathé pictorial: so long as it exists it is no longer true that one half the world ignores what the other half is doing. If something happens on the other side of the world, millions of people in the British Isles alone see it the following weeks

(and seeing it is very different from reading of it in a newspaper). That fact cannot be without importance. Then there are those countless films of foreign places and peoples, of their customs, of remote industries and the men concerned in them, the films of industries common to every country but unfamiliar except through the screen to those not concerned in them. There was a time when every man and woman knew what baking was : but now it is carried on in secret, by routined craftsmen in inaccessible works. So it is with all the processes, like weaving, turnery, agriculture and so forth. The cinema, by showing how these things are done, tends to counteract the horrid effects of specialization, which make most of us use words and entertain concepts of all sorts of movements and objects we never see or handle. The cinema helps us to live complete lives, in imagination if not in fact. And I cannot help thinking that knowing is the same thing as sympathizing. That is why I think the educative ingredients of this immense entertainment are subterraneously inculcating a shadow of sympathy among the many peoples, the many castes, in the world.

Meanwhile, we go to the pictures in search of much-needed relaxation, for an escape. "Other scenes and other hearts" will always appeal after tea.

But there is a dead level which we call the cinema. Every picture house is the same and, we almost think sometimes, shows pictures which are all the same.

Very different is the theatre. Certain types of people go to the Gaiety or to the Criterion according to their needs ; or again to the Everyman or the Lyric, Hammersmith, or to the occasional Cherry Orchards and Seagulls which hover behind metropolitan footlights. There are many kinds of theatre and almost as many types of audience. The regular habitué of the more intelligent theatres would no more think of going to a musical comedy than to a lantern lecture : and the converse is also true.

Now, in the cinema, though many people go regularly to the same picture house once or twice a week ; though the cinemas themselves assume that all films reach a certain level—that they are, in fact, all the greatest melodrama, the greatest love story, or the greatest something or other which has ever been seen : the truth is, there are more different types of films than there are of plays. There is no generalization which will really cover the Clyde Cook comedy, a travel picture, Felix the Cat, Mr. Cecil B. de Mille, Mr. Lubitsch and staggeringly serious pictures from Sweden or Germany or Russia. Even any one programme given in any one cinema on any one day in any one country contains so many different elements—ranging from the Topical Budget, through animated

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cartoons and mannequin parades, to melodramas and pictorial romances—that it is fairly clear that one of the cinema's chief attractions is, like the Music Halls—variety.

Of course, even now, there are certain differences between one lot of cinemas and another lot. Certain picture houses in the West End seem best able to please their audiences with one long drama and a quantity of short pictures, mostly travel, semi-scientific or cartoon. Even, in some places, there are halls which show nothing but travel pictures, or again, theatres are borrowed and a more ambitious film, such as *Don Q* or *The Gold Rush* is shown exclusively. But whether in time sets of cinemas decide, as I hope they may, to specialize in one particular department of film, so that comedies find their home in one street, melodramas in another, sex shift in a third, and so on, or whether we continue the present system, the fact remains that variety is the chief characteristic of the cinema considered as a whole.

I have already pointed out how very much wider is the scope of the cinema than that of the theatre. It includes, in fact, all the realm of the legitimate theatre, the music-hall, the circus, the penny peep-show, the toy kaleidoscope and the rural pageant, carefully dressed by Clarkson. In other words, in going to the cinema you do undoubtedly get value for money in the sense in which a bag of mixed toffee appeals more to the average child than a bag of the same size

filled with one kind of toffee only. Never let us forget for one moment that the cinema audience is nothing if it is not uncritical. All the regular cinema-goers I know* invariably enjoy whatever they see. This, of course, is partly because the intellectual and emotional level of films, despite the variety of their kind, is very unvaried. Those who make films do not often dare to purge with tears, wring with pity, horrify with alarming visions. The only thing they dare do is to shake their audience with laughter. Other emotions are practically taboo and a gentle level of thin sensationalism is all that the cinema maintains, though it is not all of which it is capable.

* Including the author.

CHAPTER II

Dolls and Dreams

Not "The Silent Drama"—Stage and Screen Compared—Stage claims three points—Literary beauty no rival to visual beauty—Visual beauty of films—Some counter advantages of the film—Another contrast: Hearing People Talk *v.* Seeing People Do—The combat abandoned: Tchekov and Van Gogh—The Cinema and its audience—Dreams.

CHAPTER II

Dolls and Dreams

SOME glib fraud long ago invented that detestable phrase "the silent drama" to describe cinematography, as though the cinema were nothing more than the theatre docked of its words. This dishonest and unintelligent view is persistent: one of its most patent results is the awful habit of adapting stage plays to the cinema, in the same form in which they were presented in the theatre, the dialogue still preserved and printed out in sub-titles. *The Only Way* is a good example of the horrors that result, though it is a curious fact that some pretty poor plays have made such good films that only an author would have recognized that both film and play arose out of the same material. Actually, if a play has to be transferred to the screen it ought first to be turned inside out and transmuted out of talk into pictures. But in spite of all this "silent stage" nonsense, I really believe that partisan comparisons between stage and cinema are actually unfair to the stage, in that the cinema has so much wider a range. It alone can handle natural history, anthropology and travel, which lie far beyond the capacity of the theatre. The cinema can more fully than the stage, much more convincingly, develop parable, fairy-story and romance. Still, there remains a common ground of comparison. Both theatre and cinema do

express farce, comedy, tragedy and melodrama, and over this ground they may properly and I think usefully be compared.

Now in presenting a play, the theatre has certain advantages. The most obvious is that the actors are present in the flesh. Those who saw, say, Sarah Bernhardt in *Queen Elizabeth* (a film exhibited, as far as I can remember, in 1913) felt the loss of her physical presence. Her acting was Bernhardt's acting. But it was not merely her voice that lacked: it was an emanation of personality. She of course did not know how to "express" herself in a strange and novel medium: but, even if she had, she still would have been "absent." Then, secondly, the very concentration and confinement of the actors on the stage gives an enviable intensity to what they do there. The atmosphere is one so gem-like and fierce that the audience, dazzled by that brilliant cube beyond the footlights, is given a lasting impression of light and activity. They forget that the theatre is as dark as the picture palace, and that the acting on the stage is static compared with film-acting. For in some ways the stage is more real-seeming than the screen-image. Thirdly, the stage has colour. The screen very rarely has and I myself sometimes hope coloured films will never become general. The fourth advantage of the theatre I consider a difference and not really an advantage: that of the spoken word. Since there are excellent plays in which the dialogue has no literary

merit, the literary part of a play, the peculiar beauty of the most exalted form of the drama is not an essential part of a play, not, I mean, of a play given in a theatre. And even if it were, then, ideally, the visual beauty of the best films should be the æsthetic alternative to the stage's beauty of language. The most beautiful plays are good to listen to : the most beautiful films are good to look at. There is no rivalry here. I can indeed conceive of films throughout which pictures of ineffable loveliness should continually melt into each other. There have already been promises : in one flash of conscious pictorial organization in *Rosita*, in the perspectives and architecture of *Caligari*, in the co-ordinated movement on many planes of the crowds in the *Golem*, in a certain dramatic and sharp focusing of attention on the rushing mob (seen obliquely through a narrow window) in *Orphans of the Storm*, in many feet of *Anne Boleyn*, in a treatment of landscape in *The White Sister*. *The Last Laugh* and *Vaudeville* were exciting to the eye a dozen times. There was also *The Niebelungs*, which in spite of its lack of dramatic interest, I rather fancy will be considered a classic for many years to come, because it so strove to be pleasing visually. Indeed, it contained a short dream-picture of white and black birds which was one of the finest moving pictures that has yet been achieved.

Of course the cinema has its own peculiar advantages. Visual imagery, less primitive and

more sophisticated than auditory imagery, is also sharper, more rapidly apprehended, though not richer in association, and more permanent. The eye, that is, can take in more and more definite impressions in a given time, and can associate ideas more quickly than can the ear. Tests have shown, besides, that a moving image is apprehended 20 per cent. more effectively than a static one. The makers of films have been slow to admit this, but the moment will soon arrive when the bulk of films will take advantage of the sharpness of visual imagery and then, when the films are tuned up to the acute visual machinery of the audience, I think it will be a very exceptional stage-play indeed which will give in dialogue anything like the diverse, minute and intuitive flashes into behaviour by which the films of the future will, solely by means of pictures, express drama. *The Woman of Paris*, *The Street*, *The Last Laugh* and *The Marriage Circle*, were, in their very different ways, valuable experiments in this kind.

Now the personal presence of the actors, so important to the theatre, is, I think, compensated by the cinema's increased intimacy, by the possibility of seeing the actor's very thoughts as well as his eloquent gestures and his changes of expression. Opera glasses are not necessary in the movies, you are saved the trouble of using them by close-ups: but in the theatre if you want to observe the acting, you are practically forced either to sit in the front row of the stalls,

which many of us cannot afford to do, or else to hire some glasses, which is very damnable for the eyes. And even then you cannot, as you can in the cinema, see into the minds of the actors, save through their words. And their words, I find myself at least on the English stage, you very often cannot hear.

The world of the screen is also a much wider world than that of the stage : it is not spatially confined, it has, besides an infinite variety of scenes, endless angles of vision and of focuses : you can look down on the action, or up to it, from behind or before. It also includes as part of itself all the riches of landscape or architecture, which are not, as they are in the theatre, mere conventionalized hints. The landscape and the architecture play a definite rôle on the screen : they can even be the chief characters. And the camera brings out an enormous and dramatic significance in natural objects* Chairs and tables, collar-studs, kitchenware and flowers take on a function which they have lost, save for young children, since we abandoned animism in the accumulating sophistications of civilization. The dramatic advantage of having Desdemona's handkerchief a protagonist, as it can be on the screen, not merely a property, is obvious.

And then, if the cinema has not, ordinarily, colour, it has something very much more impor-

*On this subject I warmly recommend sections of Vachell Lindsay's "The Art of the Moving Picture."

tant, which is tone. I shall speak about the value of tone in the next chapter.

But there are deeper disparities than those I have so far mentioned. The cinema is not, as I have already urged, merely drama with the words left out. It is a vision of people doing things. Now the theatre is by no means that. It is, on the whole, a hearing of people talking about what they have been or are doing. On the stage generally people do very little or nothing : they far more often have something done to them. All the mysterious chemical changes wrought in them by fate or circumstance are registered in words. Of course this is a convention. In life people are not so explicit. Folks do not argue, or soliloquize, or convey precise information in life as dramatists are forced to make them do on the stage. Everything is in the language. What events there are are conventionalized—the air is filled with menace before *Œdipus* kills his mother. An actress it is true falls when stabbed, poisoned or shot. But of itself this is nothing. She is still a woman who palpably breathes in her mock death. Her murder does not wring us. It is the hero's words, or the old servant's words, that, letting us down into their grief, make the tears spring in our own eyes and lift us by every association of sound and word-choice and cadence to a celestial sphere of exalted pity. It is as though animated dolls jigged stiffly while through their painted lips poured a heavenly and articulate music.

The stage dolls live in a box. The front slides up and there they strut in their nice toy-house, which has an exaggeratedly high ceiling to allow the human beings in the gallery to get an oblique look down into the scene. The side walls are oddly slanted, and there is almost no depth from back to front. All that is concrete is unimportant. The furniture and things might almost as well not be there. There are generally no shadows in the dolls' house, everything is vivid with sharp lights pouring from invisible and unnatural sources. The front of the house slides down : after tedious pauses and muffled bumps from behind, it rises again. The dolls are in another kind of box now—a boxed-off bit of the out-of-doors with a blue cloth sky and wooden trees with cloth leaves. Nothing is real : the audience doesn't think it is real. It concentrates on listening for the sound that will let them down into the depth of human emotion. They certainly do watch the stage, but I doubt if a blind person misses much. I was much struck by this on hearing the two first broadcast plays, written specially by Mr. Richard Hughes for the British Broadcasting Company. Though my only theatre was a pair of head-phones, I saw in imagination at least, the flooded mine, the three people trapped there, saw the girl turn to her sweetheart as vividly as I could ever have done in a playhouse. And when listening-in, just as in the theatre, one's anxiety was : What is life doing to these people ?

The cinema "stage" has all the latitude of a world of imagination. No longer are the protagonists confined within a lighted box, no longer may we watch them only fixed at one point in space at a certain distance from us. On the screen the hero and heroine move freely in a vast unbounded world of what seems like fact. Their ship, we know because we are allowed to see it from all sides, is a real, not a *papier mâché* vessel: it rides over real waves, not painted ones. The hero grows large as a giant, he becomes as small as a pea. He walks upstairs, enters a room, and we know he has walked upstairs because we have seen it, almost done it ourselves, whereas on the stage, though he says he has walked upstairs, we know he has just come from his dressing-room. In the cinema we are free to follow him everywhere, from below or above as we choose. Space as a limitation is banished: it becomes not a convention but a factor. Time as a limitation is destroyed too. In a flash we can be seven thousand years back, a century forward, in a thousand ages and areas. And all the while there is something to look at. It moves. People are doing something. We see them do it: even if they are only thinking or feeling (as in *Vaudeville* and *The Big Parade*), we still see it, either in their changing expressions or by seeing their thoughts themselves.

A cinema audience is not a corporate body, like a theatre audience, but a flowing and in-constant mass. I fancy that we associate the



Ailita (from the novel of Count Alexis Tolstoy).

A scene from the revolution in Mars.

One of the new Russian films, both expressionist and full of the spirit of propaganda

picture-house with darkness, though the theatre is dark too, because the stage is a lighted dolls' house : our minds project themselves into the light, leaving the body behind in its seat (as happened to the man in the Hans Andersen fairy-story when he wandered through the hearts of his neighbours). The stage of the cinema is in the minds of the spectators. There is no such sense of separation as the theatre-goers experience. To go to the pictures is to purchase a dream. To go to the theatre is to buy an experience, and between experience and dream there is a vast difference. That is why when we leave the theatre, we are galvanized into a strange temporary vigour, why so many people run home and act and strut in their own rooms before the wardrobe mirror. But we come out of the pictures soothed and drugged like sleepers wakened, having half-forgotten our own existence, hardly knowing our own names. The theatre is a tonic, the cinema a sedative. The cinema is a liberation of the ego, the theatre an enrichment of it. And that is why, after the feverish activity of a day of modern life, the screen calls to us more strongly than the footlights. It is not merely that the cinema is cheap, accessible, a popular not a social entertainment, and that you don't have to put your best clothes on to see Harold Lloyd fall off a sky-scraper. After the agitation of a day which includes catching buses, trams or tubes, manipulating typewriters or telephones or lathes or the machines that make

clothing and nails, a rest in the picture-house with all its flattering dreams is better for one than the more disturbing experiences in the theatre. We get too much actual experience and not enough dreams.

I admit, of course, that by reason of the absence of language, there are some subtleties, intellectual subtleties, which you cannot get on the screen : for words mean such very different things. I doubt if there is any such *double entendre* in vision. At the same time I think there are emotional subtleties which are better conveyed by the cinema than the theatre, and that in some respects character can be better portrayed there. There is an intimacy, a reality in the illusion of the cinema which the theatre cannot attain. At the pictures, we are all Paul Prys : we go round to the kitchen, we see the heroine's underwear, we see what her young man is up to a hundred miles away. Of course, it is equally true that broadcast plays make us just as much like people listening at keyholes. But looking is more convincing than listening.

It seems, then, idle to insist that the cinema is inherently inferior to the stage artistically : as idle, since the difference is one of medium, as to claim that Tchekov is a greater artist than Van Gogh. There are certainly ugly and idiotic films, but what of *Tons of Money*, *White Cargo*, and plays of that kind ?

It is by no mere accident that films are so well adapted to treat fantasy and dream : the art of the

cinema offers the world that escape from everyday life, that rationalization of conflicts which lifts the audience so completely out of themselves to a region that other ages found to lie somewhere about an altar, but which we, with our wise freedom from superstitions, our cheap agnosticism and common sense are denied. Humanity has almost forgotten how to wonder, to dream for itself : it ought to thank heaven for providing it the constant sedative, the escape from the self, which it so direly needs, in the little cheap shadowy picture houses. The cinema provides us with the safe dreams we want : and if our dreams are often not worth having, it is because we demand no better.

CHAPTER III

Art ?

Not only a story teller—The problem of movement in drawing—How the cinema begins where the artist leaves off—The beauty of related time and space rhythms—Three dimensions on the film—Wherein lies the beauty of cinematography—Colour and tone—The question of coloured films—The film and the Unities.

CHAPTER III

Art ?

IN the preceding chapter I was concerned only with one function of the film—the dramatic or story-telling one. But it has another, which is to be something to look at. The mere fact that it moves compels us to look at it, just as we cannot help staring at the moving electric signs in Piccadilly. They catch the eye. Anything that moves catches the eye because it is the eye's business to guard the body against being hit by a falling star or a coco-nut, against being pounced on by a jaguar, bitten by a bug, or stopped by a flag-day collector. That which moves is looked at.

But from being always on the look-out, the eye has learnt another habit, the enjoyment of vision, which is a very different thing. When I look from a hill down into the valleys and sigh with contentment at the green landscape below, I am not concerned—consciously at any rate—with spying for enemies ambushed in the distant hedgerows. I enjoy seeing for its own sake. No doubt the primitive men who drew the first pictures on stones and rocks were partly concerned with telling a story. But the habit of looking at paintings and drawings has generated another necessity—that of looking at pictures for their own pleasure-giving qualities apart from their story-telling value or symbolism. In my

championship of the cinema, I wish to examine this "good to look at" quality and to examine in what the moving picture differs from the static picture, and to discover what reason those people have who believe or state that the moving pictures can have no real æsthetic value.

They usually begin by saying that films cannot be art because they are photography. Now, the prejudice against photography is a very queer one. A Man from Mars would have some difficulty in seeing where lay the qualitative superiority of, say, the best and most pleasing exhibits in the annual Salon of photography and the average paintings in the Royal Academy. Yet it is the same people who sincerely admire the Academicians' work (and admire it the more, the more realistic it is, the more you could "eat" the grapes on the canvas) who are so contemptuous of photographs. It is true the photographs are not coloured, and the paintings are, but both of them are an arrangement (those so-natural paintings of flowers and household utensils are very much arranged, of course), both are slightly untrue to appearance, for the camera's one eye distorts every whit as much as does a painter's fancy. But unfortunately for the denigrators of cinematography, they forget that a film is not just photography, but moving photography, which is another thing altogether.

A draughtsman's talent really lies not so much in his ability to represent nature accurately, that is, not merely in his technical ability, as in giving



Ailita, the Queen of Mars, from a fantastic Russian film in the expressionist manner

an appearance of life to a non-living representation of life. He is also concerned with form and volume, with the use of light and shade to give an appearance of three dimensions to that which is in fact flat. The moving picture has light and shade and looks three-dimensional. But in giving an appearance of life, the moving picture and the artist are on unequal terms. The artist has eternally to arrest movement in such a way that the action which has gone before and that which will succeed the actual moment depicted are both somehow suggested. The film, on the other hand, uses motion as one of its mediums, very unlike the artist who can only suggest the life-quality by convention. So that, in this sense, the film approximates very much more to the ballet or dance-drama. Take away the story-telling quality of a ballet, and what is it ? It is a harmonious succession of moments of free, not arrested, motion in which the line of beauty follows the passage of matter in space and in which pleasure is given by the spectacle of lively units harmoniously changing their relative positions to each other and to the whole composition ; also in the various rhythms of speed. This is exactly the case with a film, though less noticeably, because attention is drawn primarily to the dramatic element. It is most appreciated consciously in the pictures of crowds, such as *Intolerance*, *Orphans of the Storm*, *The Ten Commandments*. But it is present in all films : whether there is a good or a bad rhythm, whether

the composition of movement is harmonious or not. Now the whole tendency of modern painting has been an attempt to fix eternally—that is, in the only way open to a painter—that rhythm of inter-related movement of lively units. The artists have generally gone about it by utilizing the shapes and the rhythms of machinery, because machines are static lively objects impregnated with internal movement, symbols, that is, of a free motion they do not actually possess themselves. Now the cinema, because it is not static, can take up that part of the modern artist's problem where he is forced to leave off.

In all films, even the most naturalistic and the dullest, there may be these related speed-rhythms, however awkward and inharmonious they be. But in recent German films there has been, together with a pleasing use of these time-rhythms, a use of space-time rhythms that have indeed taken up the painter's problems and worked them out more freely than can ever be done on canvas. I refer now to such films as the over-famous *Caligari*, *The Golem*, to Lubitsch's *Rosita*, if one may call that German, *The Street* and to *Warning Shadows*. There have been others but unfortunately they have not been seen in England. *The Golem* stood alone in that it used the crowds moving in the specially designed, rather distorted and angular alleyways and steep paths of the Ghetto exactly as the dancers in a ballet are moved, to emphasize a pattern.

The same structure, without the movement of crowds, was noticeable in *Destiny*, where flights of steps and balconies, not merely as symbols, but as directions of movement, were used for all emotional scenes. *Caligari*, while more interesting architecturally (if one can call "architecture" an arrangement of canvas and paint and shadows to give an appearance of architectural form and volume) did not so noticeably use crowds in counterpoint against and with the scenery, except for one short but important episode—a scene of a fair-ground, with roundabouts turning in one direction, streams of people coming and going, more roundabouts at different speeds and on different planes—an almost indescribable use of movement to convey a definite atmosphere. Films like *The Street* and *Kean* and *Coster Bill of Paris*, by using composite photography to depict mental impressions, came very close in appearance to modern painting, and any moment of those composite photographs was singularly like the paintings of Braque or any other of the cubists. But although I instance these exceptionally original films, all films are full of (generally unconscious and often bad) pictorial organization and full, too, of unconscious time and space-time rhythms. The film director, or perhaps rather, his camera-man and the person who cuts and edits the final form of the film, is nearly always an artist, a *half* artist, working in a new medium that neither he nor anyone else understands yet—the medium having quite a

new æsthetic which is concerned with movement.

I know it has often been said that the camera coming between a producer and his imaginative concepts restricts the possibility of his doing fine work. It seems to me to be as true that the canvas of an artist hampers him. Surely it is a much righter view to regard the camera as an instrument of organization, through which the producer is content to sift his studio-scene.

And, by the way, is it not a curious thing that realism is often achieved by cunning rather than by a use of real things ? *The Niebelungs*, a film in which the producer was so anxious to make good to look at that he quite subordinated the story to the scene, demonstrated this. There were mists, real, clinging mists, under trees, real tall, shadow-throwing trees. The mists and the trees were manufactured, not real, however. There are great possibilities in store for future producers who will continue to experiment along the lines of this impressive film.

It is almost impossible for a non-expert to analyse this new visual quality of the films. But, to make a clumsy beginning, you are given a flat surface, two dimensional, on which you are free to represent three-dimensional objects in motion. The third is, as in painting, indicated by the use of light and shade, of form (the film is much more stereoscopic than the still photograph). But another description of the third dimension, impossible to painting, enters : this

is the delineation of planes by the free movement of the objects in the picture. The objects, seen in the round in a sense, move not only on their own axes but also in free orbit, and the line of their motion describes the depth of the scene. It may be objected that the objects are not seen in the round because the screen is flat. But in order to assure oneself that the Venus de Milo is not hollow behind, it is not necessary to walk round her. It is sufficient if she is revolved for us. And this is what happens on the screen ; the objects are revolved for us.

The emphasis and description of receding planes by the motion of the objects goes on at the same time as the changing of their relative positions, and their changed positions in regard to the whole composition. In these movements, I consider, as much as in the more obvious " scene " as a whole, lies the beauty of cinematography. It is true that each scene, or each second of time, can be æsthetically beautiful in itself in the same way as a painting can : but all the scenes can also be beautiful in relation to each other, and in the passage from scene to scene, from moment to moment, detail by detail, as well as *en masse*, is a fugitive and unanalysable beauty, similar to that of the ballet, but still richer because less stereotyped, and more spiritual. I wonder sometimes why the Montmartre cubists go on cubing when the cinema exists.

Now the cinema does not generally employ colour. Why? Well, first of course because even now the best of the processes for getting coloured films is not wholly satisfactory. But really I am not yet convinced that there is any reason why colour should ever be utilized generally. As I said in Chapter II, while the film has no colour, it has something much more important, which is tone. Now colour without tone has no æsthetic value at all, any more than noise without music has. That is where the stage decorators and of course house-decorators too, go so woefully wrong. They juxtapose vermillion with lemon and harsh blue and veridian, irrespective of the surface on which they are displayed, irrespective of the tonal qualities of the colours employed, and believe they have been very clever—(I think it is called creating “a gorgeous riot of colour.” It certainly is a riot, all right)—as though a child should assemble at random letters of the alphabet and think it had spelt words. Colour without form and colour without tone are meaningless. Consider for a moment, our knowledge of the Old Masters. I think we know most of them by black and white reproductions. But because they have “tone” the very colours are somehow implicit in the blacks and whites and greys. Put a reproduction of a Signorelli beside a Rembrandt, a Corot, a Hogarth and *see*. I have heard the opinion expressed, indeed, that no art critic should be allowed to function until he can, from



Douglas Fairbanks in *The Black Pirate*

a black and white photograph of a painting of which he has never seen the original, accurately determine the true colours in which it is painted. Now the cinema has the all-important tone-value, and I think the absence of colour is relatively unimportant. In the harmony of shades between the fullest blacks and the sharpest whites in a well-photographed film, there is an orchestra of tones which can give to everyone, I think, the keenest delight. Think too, what horrible colours we may get if the films are to be dyed—imagine the sort of sickly sweet greens and pinks. Can we trust the taste for colour of . . . I won't mention names, but I think most of the producers you've heard about? About eighty per cent. of artists are quite unable to colour their pictures decently nowadays, so why in heaven's name should we expect any better of producers ?

However, supposing by some means satisfactory colour could be assured, there is this to be said in its favour, that colour tends to enhance the stereoscopic quality of film-photography. This was noticeable in Fairbanks' *The Black Pirate*, far and away the best colour-film made. After a few moments it ceased to trouble the eye, and dramatically it is obvious that in pirate films when seas are green and blood really red there is definite point in chromatics.

Should films preserve as closely as possible some convention of space and time? It is

remarkable at any rate that some of the most important films, from a directional or technical angle, have done so with excellent effect. Of "serious" films one has only to recall *Nju*, *Warning Shadows*, *The Goose Hangs High*, and of comedies, *Her Night of Romance*, and many another Chaplin, Douglas Maclean and Reginald Denny comedy, to recognize how a sensation of ease and brilliance is secured by limiting the action of the drama depicted to very little more than the time taken actually to exhibit the film itself, how one's attention is held because no breaks occur to bring one back to reality and how the illusion of participating in the action is thereby increased. It limits the action of the film, of course, to the expansion of one incident, on the lines of a certain kind of short story, and it allows no room for the *development* of character. On the other hand, because of the simplicity of the plot, it leaves plenty of room for the *exhibition* of character and consequently for good acting and it makes it possible to limit the subtitles to a minimum of bare conversation.

Now one of the distinguishing marks of the film is its unruliness, its power to soar beyond all limits of possibility, to depict the passage of years, to step over oceans and mountain ranges, to double back on itself and show what happened before the action commenced, to interpolate dreams and fantastic sequences. But at the same time all the various elements are made more or less successfully to cohere, if only because there

are no actual breaks in a film such as you get in a play—no “acts” and intervals. I know some Continental pictures stick “Act I,” “Act II” and so forth, into their pictures, but this is simply a piece of mistaken folly and doesn’t count. And on the whole the more successfully a film does cohere, the better. In other words, a film should have form. Though it is difficult at first to see how the best pictures have form, on examination one finds that all satisfying films have one cohesive force which holds the whole in shape. The formless-seeming Chaplin comedies, like *The Gold Rush*, are unified by the “character” of Chaplin : the film is a theme on that character alone. The comedies of Harold Lloyd on the other hand are unified by a gradually accelerated pace : they begin slowly, to end in a riot of fast movement, and it is this, not the rather colourless personality of Lloyd (who functions largely as a metronome) which gives his pictures their peculiar form. I admit that in *College Days* a touch of pathos in the comedian gave the typically mechanical Lloyd a tinge of Chaplinism ; but his picture was still a theme on accelerated motion. Other pictures again, *Abraham Lincoln*, *The Lady, So Big*, *A Lost Lady* and *Stella Dallas*, take the shape of biography, all the incidents being strung on a life-story. Germany has often used the triptych form, not an ideal method, but one which held the three parts of *Destiny* and *Waxworks* together. Pictures expressive of a mood, like *The Street*, have a better shape.

The Last Laugh was the development of character, in two contrasted aspects—jocose pride and baffled humiliation, and was further held together by unity of place; the theme being life in an hotel as well as the emotions of an ageing workman. The worst possible unity is a common one : a false emotional crisis or conflict such as one gets in the innumerable American pictures with heroines who have pasts, or are played some rough trick by circumstances and are too spiritless to fight it. The real *raison d'être* of these pictures is that they give a female star plenty of opportunity for appearing on the screen, and whether she is taking the place of her fallen twin-sister, or engaged in secret business which enrages her husband, but is in reality innocence itself, or does unaccountable things to bring happiness to her little daughter, the picture sags and oozes beyond anything that can be called true form.

The unity of space is more often kept in films than one notices : the action often takes place about one building though not in one room of it. Yet as the camera can catch the building from all sides so that the eye can grasp its identity the *effect* is of unity. Even the action being confined to one village or street may amount to the same thing if the audience is allowed to grasp the continuity of space over which the action takes place. It is not a convention to be respected overmuch, however. Contrasts of land and water, contrasts of town and country,

of open air and indoors, are useful not only to refresh and divert the eyes and to give an impression that the action really takes place in the everyday world we know, but even, too, in bringing out light and shade in character. A good example of this was in *He Who Gets Slapped*, not a first-rate picture, except for one scene, where the hero and heroine steal away from the circus to the woods one spring day and conduct their courtship under the fluttering sun-riddled leaves. The contrast with the sawdust of the circus life was reflected in the changed demeanour of the lovers, much more natural and much shyer under the trees than among their associates and in their daily haunts.

Another trick was tried in this picture : that of unifying it by the repeated interpolation of a symbolical clown, on the lines, of course, of Griffith's cradle-rocking woman in *Intolerance*, and repeated again in a smartly made but silly piece, *Time the Comedian*. In *Intolerance* it was justified because it held together vastly different elements, but there was no use for it in *He Who Gets Slapped* or the other picture. It is when film producers start being arty that the worst happens, and this is true of German and American producers alike. The less the magnates of films talk of art the better ; the critics hold a brief to do all the art-talk necessary about the cinema.

CHAPTER IV

The Public's Pleasure

Films cannot be strictly classified—The faithful three million—Some popular films : what they are and why they are popular—Why we love Mary Pickford—The Cinema exists to please women—The question of wedding bells—Some films which ignored them—A fierce digression on “this getting married business”—Do we really want so much love stuff?—How to get rid of it—Discussion of popular films continued—The public is not fickle

The Public's Pleasure

THE main headings of Farce, Comedy, Tragedy, are inadequate when one has to bind up the many thousands of films we have had into tidy sheaves. Farces we do get pure: Chaplin, Keaton, Lloyd, and all the other merriments of the screen, are almost unadulterated farce, often related to the antics of those delicious clowns of the old circus and the not quite so demodé music-hall comedians. Tragedy is practically non-existent: in fact I think in twelve years of continual cinema I have only seen three examples actually in a cinema open to the public, *Polikushka*, *Greed* and *The Three Masks*. But it would be ridiculous to call all films save these three, and the farces, by the name of comedy. There are no laws or canons for the making of films: you can mix up any ingredients.

The existence of so few tragedies is of course due to the fact that the cinema is the great wrong-resolving agent of our time. It is not intended to edify, it is not designed to instruct, or move, or thrill. It is primarily a something to banish care, even reflection, even consciousness. The cinema is a drug. That it has on certain grounds and for certain reasons an æsthetic value is more or less accidental. It is not designed to be an art, but a comforter. So much the better

in many ways, for the huge audience that the cinema has created would never have come into existence otherwise, and it is the great audience which makes all things possible. Once more, three million people a day go to some picture palace or other in the British Isles. Amusement sufficiently varied to attract so many so often (the cinema, like other drugs, is a habit) must necessarily be always in a state of flux, always mixed, generally an adulterate mixture of many improperly allied things. But the size of it does allow a small place for genuine merit: not often, but at times. As the vast audiences tire of unskilfully blended films, of repetitions of repetitions, changes and often improvements, do come. The improvements are not themselves always financially successful but they affect a great deal that comes after them, put new meaning and vitality into the whole body of the cinema and gradually permeate it with something of value.

The clumsy division of films into Pageants, Fact, Melodrama and so forth, though useful for purposes of classification, and in order to see what elements bulk largest in the whole output, is obviously inadequate when we come to arrange definite pictures under these headings. Take for instance *Robin Hood*. That was a pageant, it was also a moving-picture-poem to bodily action, and it was a simple romance. The same is true of *The Thief of Baghdad*, which was a sort of fairy-story. Fairbanks is primarily

the exponent of a healthy exaltation of bodily movement, a sort of minor divinity of physical culture, and gives his audiences a semblance of partaking joyfully in his own energetic exploits. But with the passage of time, and probably under the influence of romantic notions about "art" derived on the skew from highbrow visitors to and resident in Los Angeles, he added other things. In *The Thief of Baghdad* there was a lot of insistence on Décor, derived at several removes from Reinhardt through a few German films. For fairness I should like to record here that *The Thief of Baghdad* was composed of one-quarter *Sumurun*, a film made by Lubitsch in Germany; of one-quarter *The Niebelungs*, a film made by Lang in Germany; of one-quarter Fairbanks pure and the rest came out of the property room, palaces and all. There was much gorgeousness of the flesh and of textiles, a spurious perfuming of bazaar orientalism, a lot of "magic" of the poorest kind and not original, and worst of all, there was uplift. Now Fairbanks is quite uplifting enough himself; he stands for chivalry, clean living and simple thinking, valour, fitness and so forth. To add to that a poor moralizing tag was quite unnecessary. I hope the film was a failure,* because it deserved to be, because it cheated us of our real Fairbanks, the cheery fellow who leaps about in such a jolly way.

*I hear it was not a striking success, which in cinema worlds means failure.

The beginning of the picture was the best, for then Fairbanks did spring and grin. He understands springing and grinning and that's why he's good at it. All else that was good was the oriental villainy of a Chinese girl, Anna May Wong. *She* understands that, and when she was gliding across the gleaming floors of Baghdad palaces, and at no other time, did the piece have the true Eastern atmosphere. The rest was just fancy dress.

But perhaps realizing that art for art's sake was the one thing which the cinema was too healthy to endure, Fairbanks recovered his old style in *Don Q.* He did actually recover more than his old style. *Don Q.* was as nearly perfect as a film of that particular kind—a light Mozartian piece of pictorial picaresque—could hope to be. Fairbanks was more than a leaping puppet, more than the spirit of boyish make-believe. He really displayed to its utmost his peculiar genius for a certain kind of comedy. When, after a passionate love scene in the Romeo and Juliet manner, on a balcony to which he has leapt like a grasshopper, his lady-love runs back into her room because a duenna is imminent, for a moment Fairbanks leans tragically on the iron rail of the balcony, his head pillowed sadly on his arms. Just for a minute. Almost before one has had time to get one's sympathy with his grief really working, he gives himself a little shake, makes a little grimace as though to say : “ Well, well, dear me ! how

one does carry on about these women!" and is off down walls and pergolas as though he were made of rubber. Neither comedy nor romance is obtruded, nor, for once, even his physical prowess. The whole is perfectly welded together into something much more than entertainment and much more agreeable than edification.

Every film director the world over should sit and see through three or four times all the recent Fairbanks films in order to learn exactly how long should be given to any separate element, each single incident in any film. From *Don Q.* alone an ideal lesson of the art of accurate timing and of perfect proportion of real cinematic harmony can be learnt.

What of pictures like *The Covered Wagon*, *The Iron Horse* and *Down to the Sea in Ships*? They are romance of course: but they are also fact. I do not pretend that all their facts are correct. But they give, not only a sense of adventure, but also a sense of truth. The carts cross the desert as they really once did cross it, the animals swim the river (how lovely that scene was, and who should say why?): or the whale blows, and the boats put out after her as we know they do. This is your topical gazette in a romantic disguise, simply. So, too, was *Nanook*, that enchanting romance. It convinced us it was fact, though it wasn't at all.* So will

*Nanook was actually taken in the latitude of Edinburgh, and acted by extremely sophisticated Eskimos.

be *Grass*, the Central Asiatic successor to *The Covered Wagon*. This element of Fact (the peephole business) exists all through the cinema. Bread on the pictures is real bread cut on a real board: roast chicken—why you can almost smell it: flowers fade, they are so real (more real than the heroine's simulation of virtue which they symbolize, often). Everything is real, in fact, except the acting and the psychology. Not only pictures like that excellent *Pearls and Savages* are travel pictures. There was a splendid but most unsuccessful film called *The Ancient Law*, a story of patriarchal Jews in East Germany some 100 years ago, in which, too, everything was real. This film deserves to be revived: it was really good. And many a current film of domestic ways and means or marital difficulty is, far more than it is a "drama," a travel picture of American life.

When it comes to placing Mary Pickford's films in one group or another, in a sense Romance serves well enough. But just as Fairbanks is eternally the Youth who set out to learn what Fear was without ever finding it, so Mary is the perpetual Cinderella, the little girl in rags who in the end resides in a glittering castle with h. and c. in every bedroom, men-servants and real fur rugs. In so far she is Everywoman: that is her strength, because she is Everywoman much more wholeheartedly than her lesser rivals. In so far she is above criticism. She is not an actress but an incarnate idea, the flame

round which every woman's desire circles moth-like. Indeed her only rivals are the Bad Women—I mean Nita Naldi and Pola Negri. For every single woman on earth is, in her dreams, always and for ever, a blonde thing of eighteen, ripe for kisses, pure as the driven snow, and so forth, but maddening to all mankind, and at the same time an experienced woman of thirty-fourty with sleek tresses, dinner gowns with fish-tail trains and too much knowledge of "life," given to ruining Man as lightly as one would kill a midge. But the golden-curled eighteen is the dearest of these two dreams, as it is the more respectable. And if we all know Lilian Gish is not eighteen, and see she doesn't even look at all eighteen, what does that matter? She *stands* for eighteen and all its snow-driven purity and curls.

Now one thing never to be lost sight of in considering the cinema is that it exists for the purpose of pleasing women. Three out of every four of all cinema audiences are women. I suppose all successful novels and plays are also designed to please the female sex too. At any rate the overwhelming, apparently meaningless, and immensely conventional love interest in the bulk of films is certainly made for them. Disguise it how they may, practically every film pretends to be "about a man and a woman." This is true of farces (remember Chaplin, Keaton and Lloyd, who all have their pretty young women companions), true of big spectacles

like the *Sea Beast*, *The Covered Wagon*, as well as the plainly amatory picture. Somebody must marry somebody before the piece is through, or must fall into somebody's arms.

The insistence on marriage, or conjunction of male and female, as the end of difficulties is of course due to the fact that in actual experience we find it the beginning of difficulties. The symbolic importance of marriage is also to be found in folk tales such as those trimmed up in the *Contes de Perrault* (a man sets out to seek his fortune and wins a bride : a princess sets out to escape parental tyranny or after injustice at home and after vicissitudes is "recognized" and wedded by a prince and enjoys riches). Also in savage folk tales, though mingled here with even more resentment and fear of parental or heavenly authority and power. It is absent from much great literature, Homer, *Quixote*, *Æsop*, "*Pilgrim's Progress*," the Bible. In these, though the sexual relation is a story theme it is not romanticized, falsified or castrated, as it is in popular legend and the popular movies.

The relation of man and woman, and of men and women to the home (i.e., society) or to parents and religion (i.e., to eternity) is a theme for any art. The superficiality of courtship and wedding bells is not. It is only a daydream for the dissatisfied.

The dissatisfied (i.e., the "people") have foisted their empty dreams and discontents on civilization since the early nineteenth century,

yet it is the concepts of the aristocrats like Shakespeare which penetrate the masses and make artistic creation possible. This penetration from above the cinema overlooks : yet it is necessary.

Really it is not the whole function of woman to get herself married, nor her sole possible interest. But no doubt because it is the only thing most women ever do bring off successfully, the only thing they realize they want, this business of love (leading to marriage, of *course*), is the one preponderating subject of the movies. Cowboys, business-men, mechanics—they all go the same way on the stage or the screen, straight into some woman's arms, and then no one cares any more about either him or her. Any kind of relationship that leads to no marriage, be it business association, friendship or what not, is of no interest either.

I am blaming all this on the American films, and I think with reason. English films too are almost all love romances in some form or another, except for the straight travel films. But then English films do not bulk very large anyhow. But when you come to consider the Continental films, you notice a difference at once. Continental films are (when they are worth seeing at all) hardly ever love romances in the American sense. Take for instance, a few examples :

FRANCE :

*Coster Bill of Paris.**The Call of Motherhood.**Mother (Visages d'Enfants).**The Wheel.**The Three Masks.**Koenigsmark.**Le Miracle des Loups.**Les Miserables.**The late Mathew Pascal.*

None of these are concerned with the business of getting a man and a girl married up at all. *Coster Bill* was a character study of an old man, or an essay about legal justice. *The Call of Motherhood* was concerned with the relations of man and woman after marriage. *Mother* tells of children's feelings towards a stepmother. *The Wheel* is a picture poem to the railway, and such frustrated love as there is goes unluckily and in the end tragically. *The Three Masks* is a tale of revenge and the sentiment holds between father and son, not man and woman. The love interest in *Koenigsmark*, shocking as it was, was illicit, the passion of a boy of eighteen for a woman of forty. And the emotion in *Le Miracle des Loups* was patriotism, not love. In all of them, family life is obviously far more important than sexual passion : the French are happily able to take sex for granted and put their artistic imagination to work in other fields.

Now for :

GERMANY

The Golem.

The Niebelungs.

Destiny.

The Last Laugh.

The Street.

Warning Shadows.

Caligari.

Nju.

Peter the Great.

Cinderella.

Vaudeville.

The Ancient Law.

Dr. Mabuse.

Never in any of these is "love and marriage" the theme. Even in *The Niebelungs* the love of Siegfried and Kriemhild is only one little thread in the great canvas of magic and war and hatred.* *Warning Shadows* and *Nju* were again tales of married life, not of the business of getting married. They assumed no conventions, were plain tales of emotional crises, such as occur, or might well occur, in any home. They were truth and not fiction. *The Last Laugh* had no love interest at all : it was a character study, and so at heart was *The Street*. Character is what counts in all of them, not marriage lines.

* In twenty-four reels of *Fredericus Rex* there is the smallest possible proportion of erotic sentiment.

I have only seen one Russian film—*Polikushka*, and there was nothing about love in it as anyone will know who has read the masterly short story of Tolstoi, on which it was founded. Swedish and Danish films, again, though I do not remember many of them very distinctly, follow the Continental, not the Anglo-Saxon tradition. *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness* had no love in it.

“Well,” the reader might say here, “that’s all very well, but if you say that the cinema has artistic possibilities and virtues solely because of its size, that its size is due to the American output, and the American output is based on the public’s pleasure, what then? If the public want love stuff, the girl and the man, the marriage achieved, and so forth, why grumble?”

Well, to begin with, I am not at all convinced that the public as a whole do want love stuff and love stuff only. I think the love stuff is overdone. It’s at such a pass now that you can’t have a woman nestle in any man’s arms without the collective audience reaching for its hat under the impression that the finale is due. I concur that a love interest would always be useful and necessary in seven-eighths of all films. But not *such* a love interest. Not this cheap business of just getting oneself married, not this insistence on the feminine power of attracting a man till he finds her bed and board till the end of her days without her making one effort to deserve it.

And if it is so, then let us unite quickly to do

something about bringing the great Anglo-Saxon races to an end. For if the adult population of England, America, Canada, Australia and S. Africa think that the main thing on earth is for a woman to get herself married off, then the sooner the end the better. If I thought it, I wouldn't be concerned about picking the cinema out of the mud, I'd be manufacturing bombs and dropping germs into the biggest reservoirs. I suppose we have all liked Jane Austen for ridiculing this "getting married" business. But women in those days really had some excuse for feeling so urgent about matrimony. It was the only career open to them. To-day, thank heaven, we're crawling out of that bog! There are a good many things women can do, including the making of good wives, the kind of wives who are more than food-dispensers and child rearers, who are human beings with some individuality of their own as well. Also we are beginning to realize that a woman who isn't well—I mean who doesn't feel she is doing the best that's in her—inside marriage, is best out of it. But it's hard to get people to admit this, even if they believe it, for "popular opinion" is against them. Now popular opinion is really just nothing but a lot of lies boosted in the form of soothing syrup by the printing press and the film factory, to give people false dreams for fear they kick at true facts.

I admit it began with the printing-press. For years, thousands of sloppy stories, poems, articles,

plays and novels have been pouring out into the world harping on this great love and marriage business. But it is soothing syrup, not reality, all the same. What if we all do (the women) wish we were the heroine in *The Blue Lagoon*, or the heroine in any magazine story, or the heroine in any musical comedy? We jolly well know we aren't and sometimes we recognize that if we were we wouldn't like it. Do women usually marry the first young man they meet under suitable circumstances? No, they don't, and they tend to do so less every year. They look around. It is all very well to lull oneself from the age of sixteen to sixty with "sweet love stories," but do we act up to them? No, we don't.

We might as well, then, do something about persuading the film producers not to drop treacle into our mouths any more. It is bad for us.

If one out of ten of all the women who go to the movies here and in America would write a nice little letter to the manager of their pet cinema and tell him they're tired of just nothing but unreal love-stuff, they'd get something else. They certainly would. If one out of ten of them asked for more films like :

Abraham Lincoln
Her Sister from Paris
Forbidden Paradise
Pearls and Savages

The Woman of Paris

College Days

The Marriage Circle

The Last Laugh

Don Q.

The Black Pirate

Stella Dallas

Skinner's Dress Suit

The Monkey's Paw

The Tower of Lies

Vaudeville

The Unholy Three

Nell Gwyn

Dr. Mabuse

Her Big Night.

they'd get them. If they asked for slow-motion sports pictures, or films about people's lives, or about ideas like revenge, parental responsibility, a desire for self-expression, or what not, they'd get them. The films would be every bit as competent, every bit as entertaining as they now are. There'd still be love interest, of course, but it would not queer everything as it now does.

One moment ! Remember that *Robin Hood*, *Way Down East*, *The Ten Commandments*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, were big successes. Remark also that the love interest in them was very slight. Why there's even money in films that aren't entirely about love !

And then we might get some films about the

people who fall in love, not just about their getting caught up together ; real romance these might be, palpitating bits of sentiment. But real. For after all, what's interesting in a love story is not the fact that a man loves a girl, but (*a*) the circumstances they are in, the adventures they have, and (*b*) in their own characters and the change their sentimental relationship makes in them.

There always will be plays, novels, stories and films simply about courtship ; there is a demand for them. People know that they are " nice " just as they know jokes about fleas and boarding houses are " funny." Such sentiment indeed represents an ideal, another waking dream. All that I suggest is that out of the billions of people who do go to the pictures there exist some millions who tire of false sentiment, and I earnestly beg everyone who does so tire of it to join me and some others in a fight for variety. I say false sentiment advisedly for the majority of the films of sentiment *are* false and correspond to nothing in the actual erotic experience of anyone.

Also the cinema must develop or die, and it is remarkable that all the best films are the ones with little or no conventional sentiment in them. The best that the enlightened public can do is to boost the non-sentimental, the experimental films, the ones that cause new blood to come into the unwieldy carcase of cinematography.

The cinema runs after the public : it does not spring from the public.

We must remember that all the stories we love best in the world are not stories of sentiment. Dickens does not rely on his sentiment for his power, he only threads it delicately into his plot. Shakespeare's themes are of emotion, other than love ; in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, for instance. Or when he writes most freely of love, it is of tragic love in *Romeo*. Homer, longest lived of all, writes of men's adventures and exploits, and again only threads in the heart interest.

The public's pleasure is not, however, solely concerned with sentiment. It is odd to see how well the cinema has incorporated many ingredients of the circus, the music-hall and the popular theatre. What are the farce comedians, Keaton and the Sennett Company, but circus clowns ? What are Harold Lloyd's (and other people's) staggerings along narrow parapets but a combination of Blondin and the old circus clown ? Or if you like, they are the music-hall low comedian too : as Chaplin is, as Fatty Arbuckle was. The cowboys are relatives of the circus bush-riders, too ; I mean that the public like them for the same reason, for the pleasure of participating, at second-hand, in the apparently thrilling horsemanship, the exhilarating sense of movement, the physical prowess, the neat wildness and the efficiency.

From the popular theatre come all the melodramas which form so solid a bulk in cinema

programmes. Here D. W. Griffith is king. *Way Down East* and *Broken Blossoms*, *The White Rose* (a little watered, this) are fine and magnificent melodrama. But the Vitagraph Company have also a special line in melodramas, of which even the titles are reminiscent of vanished theatre hoardings. And Drury Lane has been run out of town with the "catastrophe" film—the railway smash, the aeroplane accident, the burst dam, the toppling pine tree, the shipwreck, and so forth. How the public dotes on catastrophes ! Cathedrals totter (*Ten Commandments*), cities finish (*Sodom and Gomorrah*), forests are burnt up (any Western "super"), homes are razed to the ground, bombs go off (in farces even), scores of people are cast away. It's adventure, lots of it, in safety, for 1s. 2d. It stimulates the glands, jostles up the emotions, and it's the public's pleasure.

How they love money ! Poverty is sometimes forced on heroes and heroines to "purify" them, but no one (except Chaplin) stays poor long. Every young man sets out to make his fortune, and makes it. Every girl marries well. It's as old as fairy stories and as wholesome. It is also as monotonous. But it is the kind of monotony no one minds, if it is ingeniously varied.

Splendour is another beloved theme. Cecil de Mille is perhaps pre-eminent at this, but the constant presence of palatial homes on the screen everywhere is only a gift of free evanescent

gorgeousness to the public. It is part of the desire for heaven-sent wealth. Is there anyone whose income is under £8,000 a year who doesn't sometimes dream of unexpected inheritances, hidden treasure, and the rest? The films flatter these dreams and make the poorest inhabit marble halls for a few hours.

And what stay-at-home does not also dream of travel? Even those who get no further than Hampstead or perhaps Blackpool, Douglas and Southend, love to fancy themselves further afield, in the arid desert, on mountain peaks, far out at sea, or beneath the palms of a tropical island. The films also supply this want. They take their uninspired heroine and characterless hero to the most unlikely spots before they set the antique machinery of courtship going: the kiss of betrothal is generally exchanged by a rocky seashore, in a forest of pines, on a yacht, in a native hut, or in the (equally romantic) slums of New York.

This is the great strength of the cinema, that it caters for daydreams—surface sentiment, riches, travel, splendour and wild excitement—more thoroughly, more generously, more convincingly than any other known form of entertainment, and offers it in the most effortless way, under the best circumstances, to music, in a twilight solitude, with no mental effort demanded of those for whom it caters.

Howls of dismay are always rending the air of Los Angeles because the public tire of first

one thing and then another. The howls generally show, not the fickleness of the public, but the density of film producers who are really so stupid that they imagine, if one film about the Argentine is a success, that they are perfectly safe in turning out a dozen more films set in the Argentine, quite forgetting that : (1) it may not have been the setting at all but some other peculiarity of the film which made it enjoyable, and (2) that their Argentine imitations will not necessarily be equally successful, even if the setting was the *bonne bouche* of the original picture, if stupid stories, particularly improbable Spanish castes, bad continuity, poor psychology and a half-dozen other common faults drown the one merit of colourful scenes. They behave, in fact, like manufacturers who think a trade mark is all that is sufficient to ensure the sale of their goods, and neglect to make their goods saleable.

The public is not fickle. It is the most ridiculously faithful of animals, as every innovator knows. It has, for instance, enjoyed low comedy, universal satires (I mean satire on the foibles of humanity, not those of some clique) and heart-rending melodrama since, at least, the sixteenth century. And it still likes all these things. But the fact that it may love one low comedy in which a dog steals some sausages does not mean that you have only to show a dog stealing sausages in any low comedy in order for it to be successful. This simple fact eludes the

somewhat extraordinary brain of many who make films.

But I wish the public could, in the midst of its pleasures, see how blatantly it is being spoon-fed, and ask for slightly better dreams.

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C H A P T E R V

The Sub-title

The necessity for the sub-title—Its true function—
“His hat and stick!”—Good and shocking
sub-titles—How to make them

CHAPTER V

The Sub-title

It is rather difficult to say how far it is necessary that paintings should have titles. As a rule it is unnecessary. The names of many of the greatest and most famous works of art are simply a means of identification—the “Man with the Copper-Coloured Nose” is a nice rich phrase but is nowise needed to explain the portrait, which might as well be called Rembrandt P. XVI save for the fact that most of us have such poor heads for figures. “The Rokeby Venus” is an indication-board, not a real title. So is the “Virgin of the Rocks.” But supposing the “Man with the Copper-Coloured Nose” suddenly turned into a moving picture (as he might well do, embodied in Emil Jannings) and began pottering about in one of those rich and intimate Flemish interiors? Though we could follow him well enough while he was in the kitchen or when he roared in the ale-house, sooner or later, once he got caught up in the plot of the story, we should involuntarily ask ourselves “What is he doing?” Were his scenario to put him to bed, an explanatory word might be necessary if he had to oversleep himself, or again, if his soldier son were undergoing some casualty at a distance. An audience cannot be asked to sit through the eight or nine hours the old gentleman is asleep, with no other

occupation than to gaze on a film showing his chest rising and falling with its deep energetic breathing. Neither can it be expected to go willingly on a little arm-chair journey along the roads that lead from the old man's bed to the camp where his son is. Something must bridge the violent gaps in space and time. And it is here that the sub-title has its proper existence.

In employing a chorus (among other things) to bridge space and time the Greek and the Japanese dramatists alike found a valuable convention. And the sub-title is really to the film what the chorus was to those dramas. It is true time can occasionally be shown to elapse by a purely pictorial device, the face of a clock changing, the shadows lengthening, the face of the sky altering. Sometimes this is the most direct and effective way, but the face of the clock and the scored calendar cannot always be employed. It is even rarer that on a small scale map may the traversing of space be indicated, though I have seen it done effectively in many travel films, in many melodramas about cross-country motor races, and in *Armageddon*, the film of the War in Palestine. But, usually, the sub-title does the work, just the work, of a chorus.

This function is not, however, the only one that the sub-title has. As in dreams, there are, in these so real shadows of life, emotional situations which culminate in a cry. At a flash-point of the emotions, the sub-title is needed, unless the actors can let us, by their bearing or by lip-

reading, get what their words must inevitably be. It depends largely on the nature of the particular situation and on the degree of expressiveness possessed by the actors. But we so well know how, in life, some inexpressive but uncontrollable exclamation bursts through the lips on hearing sudden news, at a startling encounter, at the climax of excitement during a "scene." And this cry is, when the story is being told by an artist, always not what we call "true to life," but an illumination, an amplification, a secret disgorged—and sometimes when that cry does not break out in lettering on the screen, one feels something missing, and the silence of the screen seems for a moment an empty not an eloquent silence. Of course, the person who writes such sub-titles must be an artist—the kind of person who can invent the inevitable.

Consider for a moment this situation which actually happened in "life," not on the screen. There was a girl who had a mother and father. On her twenty-first birthday they gave a garden party to celebrate it. Just before the guests arrived, the girl's father said he really must go to the dentist's, which was quite near by, as one of his teeth was hurting so badly he did not feel he could carry on otherwise. So off he went. The garden party was in full swing, tennis going, strawberries and cream in a tent, laughter, young people, girls in white frocks on the lawn. The dentist, who of course was known to all of them present (my story took place in a small village

outside a large town), the dentist, then, suddenly came running into the garden, with a bowler hat in one hand, a walking-stick in the other. "His hat and his stick! His hat and his stick!" he cried, in a foolish, bewildered way. But everyone understood a tragedy had occurred.

The party broke up. The girl's father had died of heart failure under the anæsthetic.

Well, now, the sort of title that has to be invented is "His hat and his stick!" Not the obvious fly-blown melodramatic ejaculation of "I have bad news to tell you," etc., etc., ending up with "Your husband is dead." On the other hand, they cannot simply carry the dead man's body in on a stretcher. That would be too sudden, too shocking.

There have been several films without subtitles of which Hepworth's *Lily of the Alley* is probably the best known. It was perfectly comprehensible throughout, but I should have preferred an occasional title. The story was not emotional enough to dispense with words, took place over too long a stretch of time and place. On the other hand, *Warning Shadows* (that almost perfect piece of cinematography) used titles only to introduce the characters. This introduction was itself rather slow, an inelegant device. But the rest of the film had no need of titles. The unities of space and time were perfectly preserved, so that there were no gaps to bridge and the acting was so detailed and so finely expressive that all explanations would

have been odious ; and odious indeed was the long prefatory note which appeared on the screen before the actual picture was projected at its first appearance in this sadly benighted country. As to *The Last Laugh* I don't think anyone realized that it was titleless.

Of course such conversations as there are, between characters, which are not intelligible to the audience (I mean of course such conversation as is essential to the progress of the plot) without being translated verbally, must be given. Here, however all producers seem inclined to underestimate the perspicacity of the audience, and give us long and meaningless speeches, where one crisp sentence would do a hundred times better. The actors are to blame too in that they do not try all various means of expression to eliminate the need for printed dialogue. Acting, as long as it is perfect expression, must always on the screen or elsewhere be so much better than words. Most of all it is important that film plays in which the minimum of conversation is necessary should be selected for production, rather than straight adaptations of novels and stage-plays which always demand so much verbal explanation. *Anna Christie*, which was quite an intelligent and reasonably good play, was a perfect mess as a film, for the simple reason that the subject made it impossible to *show* much of the heroine's past, it had to be related ; and the final conflict between herself, her lover and her father, could also only be explained in

words. I daresay a German company with no regard for making a recognizable copy of the stage play might have made a splendid film out of it, an unpleasant bitter film. But that is another matter altogether, because they would have turned the original form, the theatre form, inside out.

The making of sub-titles might well be held to be a new form of literary style. The sub-title must be crystalline, packed with meaning, allusive, condensed—a work of art and elegance and simplicity, in fact. I think the *vers-librists* would make good title writers : they write fresh active pictorial phrases, they avoid redundancies, elaborations, clichés. Producers in America will have no trouble in discovering the best people in this school of poetry and in harnessing them. I myself have taken past exercise in *vers libre*, and for fear of seeming artful or impertinent, I frankly offer myself as an apprentice sub-titler for a period of six months to any film company that cares to have me. Brevity would be my motto and eloquence (not flowery eloquence but the small sweet voice) my ambition.

I do not generally like films in which there are no sub-titles. I do like very much films in which there are the minimum, and those of so expressive and inevitable a kind that one does not notice them, they come so pat. All Chaplin's early films were extremely well titled. This is partly because Chaplin is so expressive himself, he doesn't *need* hundreds of

words to explain what he is doing. But lately he has taken again to somewhat too many words. Lubitsch's *Marriage Circle* and Grune's *The Street* are two other well-titled films. Comedies tend to be better titled than melodramas. Constance Talmadge's comedies are often full of witty brevities, and so are those of Reginald Denny.

There is nothing more irritating than the tedious pause after one has read the title and before the picture proper begins again. Film audiences are pretty quick and I think, though I may be wrong, that the trade as a whole always underestimates its capabilities and its literacy. "Art titles" or sub-titles with drawings, generally symbolical, are often quite pleasant and sometimes very funny. You know the kind of thing: when the title explains the villain's identity the letters are backed by a terrific drawing of a wolf with long white teeth and glaring eyes. On the other hand the lettering both of this and other types stands in need of much care and improvement.

As to the general badness, from a literary point of view, it is not necessary for me to flog this much-whacked old horse. Most titles are bad: they are inarticulate, long-winded, foully worded, mispunctuated and altogether idiotic. It is a matter of bad taste. They tend to be horribly ornate, like the *nouveau riche* drawing-room. If the sun rises: "The dawn's rosy chariots" almost inevitably "race across the heavens."

Time comes "with his healing touch." Death "the Reaper." Love. . . . What do the films not say about love? I will quote what a divorced countess says of love in Mr. Stuart Blackton's *Let not Man put Asunder* :

"Love is like a garment: new, we wear it: old, we twist and turn it: comes a day when we throw it away."

This had nothing to do with the story, threw no light on the character of the Countess (she had none, she was a well-dressed animated dummy). I feel sure that this blatherskite brought sweet tears to Mr. Blackton's eyes. The cinema audience, on the other hand, I am sure is unmoved unless to laughter.

In *The White Sister*, a very superior production in many ways, when Lilian Gish was struck down by the sudden news of her lover's death, the family doctor said :

"The terrible shock has paralysed her emotions."

The audience did laugh a little at that. But not enough. They should guffaw, yell, do something to call attention to all this garlanded nonsense and obliquity and ask for the best that can be obtained, which is simplicity and directness and purity of style, the minimum of words, the least mental strain, and the best lettering type obtainable.

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CHAPTER VI

Acting

Some questions on acting—The development of stage acting—The birth of cinema acting and its childhood—Chaplin makes it grow up—Some horrors of acting for the films—What film acting should do—What not—Reasonable help for the film actor.

CHAPTER VI

Acting

WHEN I prepared to consider what film acting is or ought to be I had to recognize that I did not then know what any kind of acting "is" at all. I knew of course from observation in the theatre that there were two kinds : one in which the unvarying personality of the actor subdued every rôle and amounted to a personal appearance rather than an interpretation of the dramatist's creation—another in which the rôle disguised the personality of the actor. I knew that I preferred the latter, without clearly knowing why, save that I felt roughly that I failed to see why one should pay to go and see an actor be himself when his job was to be Mark Antony or Mirabel. It would be so much more economical and sensible to meet him at a tea-party free of charge.

A world of speculation opened to me, for I found that while everyone had their own opinion of what acting ought to be, there were no fixed standards. I began to ask questions, which I propose to repeat here :

(a) What is stage-acting beyond a delivery of the dramatist's written words and the natural actions that go with those words? Does a stage-play mean anything to a deaf person?

(b) How did the cast in *The Frogs* and in any "Noh" drama act?

(c) Do people know what they mean when they talk of miming? Is miming acting?

(d) Is a music hall comedian an actor? Was Marie Lloyd and is Grock an actor? If Billy Merson is not an actor, why not?

(e) Ought the actor to do what he thinks best or what the dramatist might be supposed to have meant, or (and this is very important) ought the actor to do what the producer or stage-manager thinks best? I certainly think he ought to do the latter and I think the producer ought to do what the author intended as well as he can.

(f) Taking away the words, how is "acting" achieved? Is there a constant range or several constant ranges of gesture, of expression?

(g) In what do film acting and stage acting (stage acting not including the spoken word, I mean) differ?

After asking myself and many other people these and many other questions, I retired to the British Museum, after preliminary conversation with a professor of English literature and a film-actor. I am still full of questions, but I do feel that as a beginning the following comments of mine are on the road to the truth.

We might, I think, just as well throw overboard any idea of keeping acting in the line of tradition. The line of tradition has been completely severed in Europe: for acting originally was quite unlike anything we know now, though a glimpse of its decadence may be seen by

persons fortunate enough to travel in the East and witness the ritual dances, either of savages, or of nations like the Burmese, Tibetans and so forth. Though often the dancers have forgotten what the movements they make represent, their movements are acting, that is, they do have a precise meaning and are not gymnastic in origin. And the movements that the actors of antiquity made, whether in Greece or India or Japan, resembled those dancing movements. A certain position of the body "represented" something, the hand held in a certain way "meant" something else, but did not of course imitate the natural gestures of everyday life at all. It was a sort of semaphore dance-language. And of course, as generally the actor's face was masked, his expression did not come into play. Anything less like modern acting it would be difficult to imagine.

Where then did acting as we now understand it have its origin? There are said to have been two sources. One, in the mystery plays and pageants, of a religious nature, which were so popular in the Middle Ages: they told a story more or less naturalistically. The other, and far the most important source, was in the play-acting, for many centuries, of strolling bands of players—vagabonds who earned a living by amusing rich people at their parties and the crowds on holidays, by juggling, acrobacy, dancing, music and back-chat. Now these bands of players, versatile by necessity, though not necessarily stupid at all,

sometimes got taken up by patrons and stabilized. Others made their more or less permanent headquarters at the great fairs and circuses and popular gatherings. Here they came in touch with the literary drama and the literary drama with them—as one sees in Shakespeare, by the way, when the popular stuff (clowns and comic characters) is dispersed among classical figures and purely poetic speeches.

They “acted” little plays, which they made up themselves from some familiar story, and which, when the players came in touch with culture in France and in Italy, rose to something more than a traditional and popular amusement and became drama, the “illegitimate theatre.” The literary drama has its own history and succession, and the popular dramatic diversion equally its own, though sometimes the two fuse with remarkable results.

The cinema owes its origin to the livelier, more democratic side of the theatre, the side on which the circuses, the music halls, the cheap stock-companies that keep melodrama alive to this day, have their existence. At first acting hardly concerned it at all. There was something to look at, simply, a travelling perspective of landscape seen from the front of a train, a crowd of ordinary people. In England as early as anywhere it occurred to bright people to photograph actors doing something, policemen threatening the then decidedly humorous motorists in their high noisy horseless carriages, or a

young man running off with a young lady, her irate mother in pursuit. Later, little stories began to be told on the spotty and dazzling screens set up in disused warehouses and lecture-halls. At this point acting began. Sub-titles were infrequent in those days, the anonymous film actors had to make it quite clear what they were doing, use exaggerated gestures. If someone were ill, and needed medicine, you saw them in bed, then a medicine bottle which was turned upside down, to show it was empty, then someone going off to have it filled beyond a door marked CHEMIST. It was rather like the modern ballet which tells a story every bit as pompously. The acting was about as good as that achieved by private persons playing dumb charades. It was at this period that Chaplin and Pickford were quietly acting in little films anonymously. France, England and Italy made the best pictures then.

It is not quite true to say "And then came D. W. Griffith with the close-up," but it is useful. The use of the close-up grew on the makers of films to such an extent that even to-day when writing of the cinema the majority of people refer to the enormous (and glycerine) tears which roll down heroines' faces, although as a matter of fact one hardly ever sees that kind of close-up nowadays. The human face, much larger than life, struck the universal imagination perhaps not agreeably, but forcibly. Acting for a time was restricted to labial tremblings and

ocular twitchings. Every emotion was portrayed by a gargantuan visage, very conventionally. For the rest, the actors were mostly only seen doing things. The conventions of the grand old heart-wringing melodramas came to roost in the film-studies. D. W. Griffith brought lots of them himself. The heroine with her bundle of shame, the too-too honest lover suspected of all but the audience, the industriously and unreasonably active villain, one hundred per cent. wicked for twenty-four hours of the day, the snow, the comic relief and all. This was good. The grand old heart-wringing melodramas, "the stuff to give 'em," are good, sound, moving stuff. They are traditional in the best sense (in a popular tradition), even purge with pity and terror, and keep the flame of pure drama alive until genius comes in, every hundred years or so, to lift it to the regions of pure art. Some of the conventions are delightfully incredible. When people fight, one always falls heavily without being touched. When aspersions are cast on a hero or heroine, everyone believes them guilty at once, and so forth. But melodrama teaches people to act, in one way. It teaches them to make gestures which, though not necessarily natural, can be understood. And this is what cinema acting began by being.

The same thing applies to acrobats and clowns who can and do perform to audiences in all kinds of countries, language being no bar. Fairbanks and Chaplin, Keaton and Linder do things which

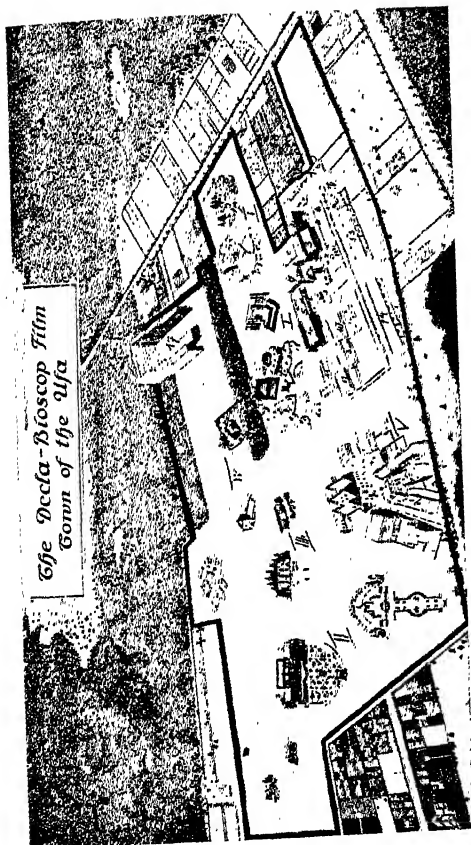
everyone understands : they are in this sense clowns and acrobats. But Chaplin made a discovery (I think he might have the credit of this). He found long ago that the camera's eye looks closely, far more closely than the collective eye of a music hall or theatre audience, and can actually catch an actor's thoughts by catching his face. I suppose Griffith discovered, too, that emotions can be conveyed by the subtlest movements of face and hands, judging by his middle period. Perhaps even the early—now forgotten—French producers of 1912-14 had realized it. At any rate, the camera certainly has established a most uncanny intimacy between onlooker and actor. To *think* what one is feeling is part of the best film-acting, and to think it not only through the face but the whole body. From the emphatic, almost ritual gestures of the early days of film-making, the minimum gestures are now employed, and deliberate and understressed ones at that. It is naturalistic acting to the *n*th ; some people can do it spontaneously (very unexperienced ones with no preconceived ideas of what acting ought to be), some people can achieve it out of a lifetime of experience. Others, and many of them well-known cinema personalities, cannot effect it at all.

There are in the cinema, as we know it to-day, as there are on the stage, two kinds of actors : those who can act and those who can't. Of the latter, the successful ones are those who have no power to convey anything but their own foot-

light or arc-light personality and appearance, the women who look lovable or arch or vampish, and the men who look nice fellows, or gentlemen, or rogues. Among the tender gender is Norma Talmadge who, though she tries impressively hard to act, really does nothing but please people by her slightly puzzled expression, her well-set eyes. One likes her on the screen as one likes a person one knows, and she is always Norma Talmadge, hardly ever the character she is portraying. Among the men are Richard Dix, Milton Sills and Thomas Meighan, always their own true screen-selves, never actors. They are popular favourites, not histrionic experts.

Those who really can act are generally much less well-known, such as Warner Oland, Raymond Hatton, Louise Fazenda, Donald Crisp, Zazu Pitts, and Willard Louis. They do not always get a chance to show they can act, for one thing because many films do not permit of acting but only of personality performances. And the mere ability to act tends at first to lessen the actor's hold on the public, because he offers them something variable, appearing to-day as a cheerful ploughman, to-morrow as a gloomy gamekeeper, instead of as ever his own sweet self.

Acting for the pictures is a most unpleasant thing. You coat yourself with a bilious-looking make-up and leave your orchid-house-heated dressing-room for a vast emporium cluttered with the weirdest objects—half-built scenes and half-dismantled scenes, timber, electric cables,



*The Deca-Bioscop Film
Town of the Ufa*

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|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Porter's lodge. | 7. Carpenter's shop. | 14. Properties. |
| 2. Administration building. | 8. Electric power station. | 15. Building material. |
| 3, 4. Glass-Studios. | 9. Underground film vaults. | 16. Canteen. |
| 5. Developing and printing department | 10, 10a. Properties. | 17. Open-air Studio. |
| 6. Properties. | 11. Cloakrooms. | 18. Nursery garden. |
| | 12. Fire escape. | |
| | 13. Mechanics' workshops. | |

Prospect of one of the "Ufa" Film Company's groups of studios, Berlin

carpenters joyously hammering at their work, painters painting the "marble" floors of a palace, hanging arc-lights, portable reflectors, perambulating arc-lights, trestle tables and crowds of supers, not to mention assistant directors, property men, wardrobe mistresses, journalists in search of copy and the aunts and mothers of other actors. Suppose you have to enact a hot scene in a steamship cabin, you wend your way through the debris to three-eighths of a cabin, find out what you are supposed to be doing in your scene and take the first rehearsal. Just as you are beginning to warm up to your work, and feel it, the director shouts out "Thank you" and you go back to the beginning. Even when he is tolerably satisfied, he will probably (if it is a "telling" scene) have it photographed in the finished state several times. By this time several hours have elapsed. You change your costume and are then called upon to do the close-up scenes of another bit you did the previous day. An army of helpers descends on you: your collar was turned up yesterday, not down, your smile was more wistful, your hair differently arranged. You adjust your appearance, the lights are focused on you, the brave little studio orchestra strikes up and you try to feel the same as you were trying to feel yesterday. Each time you think you have succeeded the director shouts "Thank you" and you begin over again. A dog's life. It is as though an eminent violinist were never allowed to play his piece through,

but asked to play one phrase exquisitely to-day and take up the theme exactly on the morrow for another eight bars with confidence and continuity. Nevertheless, those are the conditions. They are not so hard, in one way, as the conditions imposed on steeplejacks and the penalties for incompetence are very much lighter.

It is true, too, that it is hard for all but the few very best people to act well in an inferior story. For one thing, a perhaps only half-realized air of defeat settles down in the studio and, from the director to the smallest official, confidence (a most inspiring and infectious thing) is lacking. Add to that the normal austerities of acting in bits without any audience, and it is obvious how much harm a poor, a silly story does. It is obvious that it is a director's duty to IMPROVE on his scenario.

But to return to acting. To act for the films is to be economical of gesture and expression, to be under-emphatic and yet deliberate, in fact to do what will make the cinema audience believe you are going through a certain emotion when they see you on the screen. You have to set up a faint reflex in the remote audience. You must cry not only so that they will believe you are crying, but even so that they will feel a little like crying too. Now this is the director's job. He is the man who is supposed to know just what you must do to create the requisite effect. You may know, too, by having watched yourself in previous pictures, though even genius is notori-

ously bad at appreciating its own talent at the summit of perfection and I should be quite prepared to learn that Chaplin thought *The Pilgrim* his best picture. But anyhow, the director knows best and you must follow him as the orchestra follows the conductor's baton.

Film acting is as different as possible from stage work. On the stage the voice is the greatest asset, for even when actors have expressive bodies, hands and faces, what they do with them is lost on most of the audience. The pit and the gallery, the back of the dress circle, cannot see much expression on an actor's face : subtleties have to be conveyed through the mouth. On the screen subtleties have to be expressed through gesture and expression only, and in such a way that they seem natural. There is an intimacy between the cinema audience and the film actor as great as that between any two persons talking. The range of communication is limited. "To be or not to be" cannot be "conveyed" by a film actor* : he can only build up the conception of a Hamlet who moves about, smiles, like a man who would prefer death to the domestic problem he is called on to face. Theatrical posturings, many of which actually arise from the necessity for clear delivery (Kean used to speak "to be or not to be" with his hands above his head in order to give his lungs full play), are meaningless. Film actors must not

* Though Sir J. Forbes Robertson, when acting in a film years ago, is said to have insisted on trying to do so.

do what stage actors do when they are *saying* that they are angry with their wives, they must act like a man who a deaf-mute could see, spying through a keyhole, *was* angry with her.

Of course, much of the badness of film acting is due, not only to inefficiency and laziness on the part of the actors, but to the paucity of the scenarios used and to the infertility of mind of directors. In addition to its normal plot-matter a scenario should also contain character sketches of the persons concerned in the story, rather on the lines of Shaw's stage directions. Even if the action of a film only lasts a day the actors and director need to know what kind of people the characters are, what their past and personality. Otherwise (as we so often see) they become mere stock figures and the audience not only cannot "recognize" them as real creatures, but cannot take a real interest in their adventures either. If the character drawing has not been done before and if it cannot be tacked on to the script then the director in conjunction with the actors must do it.

Once the actor knows the kind of person he is supposed to be—not merely a rich young man, but a rich young man who hates music, plays cards badly, is fond of dark and small rather than tall and fair ladies, preferring inaction to action, with a warm corner for his father, to whom he is rude, but loved by his mother, to whom he is polite, kindest to his little nephews, never wearing spats but always sporting a bowler, bets five

times a year and gives recklessly to beggars, not particular about his own dress : then there is a chance to act that particular rich young man. Then the director can, behind the actual plot, indicate subtly but surely the life-background against which the plot occurs, and he will be able to visualize the details of the fellow's bedroom and dining-room, not to make them look like exhibits at a furniture store. Some unnecessary things are essential in a good film for the sake of colour and character—things like cigarette ends and lobsters for instance, and some unnecessary gestures are necessary too for the sake of naturalness.

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CHAPTER VII

Stars

The rise of Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin—
They create the Star system—How this has
benefited the cinema—How handicapped it—
Stars must never change their courses—Which
Stars to watch and why—How the system spoils
the actor—Warning words to young Stars—
Personality alone does not make the actor.

Stars

THE two greatest names in the cinema are, I beg to reiterate, Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin. Even our witty Judges do not pretend ignorance about them. Maybe neither Pickford nor Chaplin have quite the hold on the public imagination that they had five years ago, but for all that theirs are the greatest names in the cinema and from an historical point of view they always will be great, as pioneers and patron saints.

Both of them were in the movies early ; both served a stiff apprenticeship playing in stock film companies. Both remained anonymous for a long while and remained comparatively unknown long after. Both were specialists : Mary with her curls and her "love's young dream" look ; Chaplin with his hat, his boots, his stick, his moustache and his clowning (of the music-hall variety). Their salaries rose gradually, and not very high at that. Chaplin led, because he made people laugh and Mary only made them all tender and dreamy.

But Mary had an instinct for business.

I suppose it dawned on her gradually that she might run her screen personality as a business : that her looks, her own film personality, might become one of the most saleable lines of goods.

The great moment came when she heard that

Chaplin was just about to begin receiving a bigger salary than anyone had yet dreamt of. This was in 1912, and Chaplin's salary was to be \$67,000 a year. Mary went to war. She won her first campaign by getting her own salary, which had been \$500 and then \$1,000 a week, up higher. Neck and neck she and Chaplin climbed.

People who had never been to the pictures heard of the immense salaries Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin were getting. They were both famous. At the same time they both received a great deal of help from publicity. Now it is perfectly obvious that publicity without the public is useless. One only has to think of an ill-starred young Englishwoman called Margaret Leahy who won a beauty competition, was "taken up" by the Talmadges, given a star part in a comedy with Buster Keaton and was at once turned down by the public who recognized her for what she was: an untalented, self-conscious girl, utterly nice, with a pretty face and smile, but no more. She disappeared from the films as rapidly as she had rushed into them. And she had had heaps of publicity. No, the public picked out Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin first. Publicity made an emperor and empress of them.

But something else happened. They had become "stars." Their names were billed in large type outside cinemas. One went, not to see "the pictures," but to see Mary Pickford

and Charlie Chaplin. There was in effect a revolution.

Chaplin had little or no hand directly in bringing this off. The public took to him, his managers and friends did the rest towards creating a star out of a comedian. But Mary Pickford had a big hand in it. In one sense she "created" stars. Of course the thing was helped along in many ways, notably by Samuel Goldwyn who got Sarah Bernhardt into the movies, and Theda Bara and Mary Garden. But none of *them* stayed. Mary made herself a star by her own unremitting efforts ; she created a character for herself on the screen, she invented a brand of girlhood which the public responded to, and she built up this character, stabilized this brand by every effort in her power. And she succeeded magnificently. To-day she is more than a star, she is a successful business magnate.

I will diverge for a moment and sketch her future. I predict that in from three to five years she will retire from the films altogether, and devote herself to producing or financing. She will not be inactive, depend on that. In another ten to fifteen years from that she will come back on the screen in mature parts, and show us what an actress she is, apart from her "golden-haired darling" personality. This will solve many difficulties. I have often remarked on the fact that only girls and elderly women appear in movies. That is partly because Mary has dominated the cinema too much and her

partial ability to continue looking eighteen has made all the other female stars try to go on looking twenty until they are sixty. Once Mary has "aged," scores of film actresses will allow themselves to age too, and a jolly good job. But enough of this. Of course there will always be a demand for "young" actresses. Who else can play heroines of sweet love stories?

Now I submit that the rivalry between Mary and Charlie, and Mary's creation of the star system, was at once

1. The greatest possible benefit to the commercial development of the movies ;
2. The greatest possible handicap to its artistic* development.

1. Mary became a star. She endeared herself to the world. Her appearance and a version of her tastes, her clothes, her recreations, her "ways," have been firmly implanted in the universal heart. All the other film stars have followed suit. Tons of printed matter are issued from film companies' offices every year in the attempt to establish film stars securely in the public's mind. It is quite astonishing indeed to meet a film star for this reason. It is uncanny to meet a man or woman and to know so much about them beforehand—much of their past history, matrimonial state, their income, the appearance of their homes, even of the interior of their homes. It makes

*N.B.—I do not, when I say "artistic," mean "arty." I mean just its own gradual shaping-up and formation as a *distinct* form of story-telling, an idea-catching, picture-writing form.

communication difficult for one can't "make friends" with such creatures. They indeed live in glass-houses, if anyone did, and often magic glass houses, far removed from actuality. Just as a film star looks different in the flesh, so does the star personality often differ from the actual one.

I suppose that this curious intimacy with film stars accounts for the preponderating part of the cinema's success. It digs the cinema deep into the affections (for all is presented in a favourable, a romantic light : even divorce and debauch). And I feel perfectly sure that it is on the actors and actresses that half the prosperity of the cinema rests at the moment. People go to see Gloria Swanson or Richard Dix, not the films they are in. The earth quakes when Anna Q. Nilsson cuts off her "wonderful" hair. Colleen Moore's dislocated spine raised more sympathy than a calamitous earthquake. Charlie Chaplin's latest marriage caused more gossip than all the "Smart Set" together.

2. This in many ways was the worst thing that could ever have happened. The stabilizing of stars' popularity became the thing of prime importance ; not the making of good and ever-better picture stories. In fact, in point of intelligence and in psychology, most of the films of 1912-15 were as good as the films of 1918-25, or better. Everything has gone by the board but the stars.

Take as an instance a film most ridiculously

called *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Someone at the head of Metro-Goldwyn films heard of this novel as being a classic and decided to film it. The rights were bought and Blanche Sweet (a golden-haired one) fixed on as the heroine. The director, Marshall Neilan, who is Blanche Sweet's husband, and certainly others of the company, saw in the skeleton plot of the book an opportunity for Miss Sweet to show out as a great dramatic star. She was in luck to have so strong a part, no doubt they thought. No expense, no trouble was spared (except that I think none of them troubled to read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* with any degree of respect or understanding). Part of the company came over to England to take exterior scenes actually in the English countryside, in which "doubles" of the heroine, with "doubles" of Clare and Alec, were seen at a convenient and therefore undetectable distance. Expensive evening frocks were bought and motor-cars provided for Miss Sweet to use in the film. And she used them.

Now as a strong dramatic film *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was certainly good. It was sincere, the human values were truer, the dramatic situation more convincing than is common at any rate in average American dramas. And Blanche Sweet did display power in it ; she made a good deal of the murder scene. No doubt her value as a star was enhanced thereby.

But the whole thing was an absolute desecration of Hardy. Acted by any cultivated cast, or

even produced by a sensitive man, it might have been a memorable and a great thing (though no doubt not commanding a big financial success). As it was, it was an outrage, and nothing more. And the star system was to blame. Blanche Sweet is not the Tess type ; nor, on the other hand, has she the resources necessary for " acting " a Tess ; nor, lastly, did she try to play Tess. She was just a star, a popular figure set up for the crowd to admire.

Think of Nazimova, a real actress, compelled to play " bad girl " parts at fifty and more. Think of all the women of forty who are compelled to go on being kissable rosebuds of eighteen. The stars daren't try to act ; no one would recognize them. They just have to go on playing the same type-part that they started in. The number of times Jack Holt and Dorothy Dalton played the same part in the same story—and now where are they ? And think of Barbara la Marr, ever the Latin temptress ; Mae Murray, ever the impetuous gamin ; Fairbanks, the athletic clean-minded young-feller-me-lad ; Pickford, the cheerful little slavey in rags who comes at last to riches ; think of Menjou, the eternal cynic, and Lew Cody, the everlasting rotter ; of Rod la Rocque as a nice young man tempted ; of Jackie Coogan trying not to grow up and struggling to remain the same " Kid " in spite of the passing years.

As a matter of fact, a revolt against this stereotyping stardom has set in. Pauline

Frederick, a real actress, no longer tries to play twenty (as she was forced to by Vitagraph not long ago). Colleen Moore, a plucky little piece of spirit, has jibbed at an eternity of flapper parts and at twenty-one has played old women. May McAvoy we have seen ugly. Gloria Swanson trembles on the verge of giving up stardom for acting. If only she quite did! Menjou is swearing at his own eternal villainy. Fairbanks is getting too old anyhow to keep on long as his star-self. Mary Pickford, too. I often hope some day Chaplin will show us what he can do besides Charlie. Do you remember in *The Woman of Paris* a Franch railway porter who dashed a heavy trunk to the platform and rushed away muttering in his beard? That was Chaplin. What a true and remarkable bit of acting it was too!

Need I add that Emil Jannings who is admittedly a great "star" has never appeared twice in anything like the same rôle, and still has won fame under immense difficulties? And I believe it might always be that way: real acting could "tell" in the end with the public just as well as the star system with its endless repetitions and meaningless performances.

It is possible to construct a film, even from an unsuitable story, in a sound and artistic fashion *if* your film actors can ACT. Otherwise your story must be cut to fit the capability of your actors and then comes inevitably false psychology and unconvincing drama. Both these

things are if possible to be avoided. Stars cannot act. It has never been required of them. We must do away with stars, refuse to be hypnotized by publicity and look at the performance of the actors on the screen as though we had never heard of them before, and complain to them and to the management if we don't think them good enough. Much could be done in this way.

Here are the names of some film actors who really possess talent ; from America and Europe as well :

EMIL JANNINGS. A little "stagey" yet for the films, but able to express anything : emotions, conversation, thoughts and impulse economically and unmistakably. Able to touch high dramatic tension. His important films are *Nju*, *The Last Laugh* (he was too slow sometimes here and best in the comic part), *Money Madness*, *Peter the Great*, *Passion*, and best of all, *Vaudeville*. I did not so much like his *Henry VIII*, good though it was, and never saw his *Pharaoh*. *Quo Vadis?* didn't give him a chance as Nero, but he is the one really pleasing thing in it. His film *Vaudeville* is the best—as entertainment, as acting, and as a FILM.

RAMON NAVARRO. This young man was obviously destined for a stock star, the "Latin lover" on the Valentino model, but without quite so much stress on the physical attractions. In *The Red Lily* he ran away with his part and showed himself a real actor, a thoughtful, sensi-

tive, hardworking actor. He has a grace of bodily movement which is attractive, a look of refinement which is irresistible, but he must fight against these two qualities being exploited at the expense of his dramatic talent.

GIBSON GOWLAND. Magnificent in *Greed* and in *Blind Husbands*. If he can do anything else as fine (not the same thing again) then he ranks with Jannings.

VON STROHEIM. Though Stroheim has been a producer and is now often nothing much but an ex-producer, in *Foolish Wives* he taught all America what acting was. His hesitations, his small natural gestures, all speak, which is as it should be, but seldom is. He did nothing that meant nothing. Others please copy.

CHAPLIN goes first. Even in his farces this strange person can run all the range of emotions most delicately. Personally if he wants to play *Hamlet* I say let him! I believe he could carry anything off from Fagin to Falstaff. There is a young man very like him, absurdly like him in looks, on the Continent, by the name of Ernst Deutsch. If Chaplin doesn't soon appear in a "serious" part Deutsch should cut in and try *his* hand at it. Deutsch is a young man with a future if he only knew it, anyhow. He played lead in a beautiful, unsuccessful film called *The Ancient Law*.

HENRI KRAUSS was Valjean in *Les Miserables*—I suppose it was in 1914 or 1915. A wonderful romantic actor. Also played the father in a rare

and lovely tragedy, *The Three Masks*, about 1923. Should be seen much oftener.

WERNER KRAUSS. Another great German actor. Was the Doctor in *Caligari*, the Sultan in *Decameron Nights*, the Baron in *Nana*, Jack the Ripper in *Waxworks*, Pilate in *I.N.R.I.* Can create tension and power out of almost no part at all.

BERNARD GOETZKE was Death (or The Stranger) in *Destiny*; the violinist-revolutionary in *The Blackguard*. His restraint has a volcanic effectiveness.

FRITZ KOERTNER, the Husband in *Warning Shadows*. A tumultuous and terrifying dramatic personality this, more exuberant than either Gowland or Jannings, more intimately emotional, but most effective in psychological stress.

ADOLPHE MENJOU, MONTE BLUE. It is suspected, but not proven, that both these men can do more than we've seen. I begin to believe it. Menjou I once saw act sick very convincingly. Blue seems as though he can do more than be shy and lovable and awkward and well-meaning: Menjou as though he can do more than be a cynic.

JOHN BARRYMORE was masterly in *Beau Brummel*, but not in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He made love with real distinction in *The Sea Beast*, and acted, if not perfectly, at least 150 per cent. above the average to be expected in that type of film, but is always too much Barry-

more and too little the man he is meant to be in the film.

I do not consider Conway Tearle, Thomas Meighan or Milton Sills are actors at all: in fact I'm positive they aren't. They're just great big manly stars. Nor do I think Richard Dix is and I'm sure the man who plays opposite Norma Talmadge isn't. Barthelmess may be, though he's got a peculiarly inexpressive immobile bony face which is against him. John Gilbert has makings in him, on top of his sex appeal. People like Holbrooke Blinn, Theodore Roberts, Ford Sterling, Willard Louis, Moore Marriott, Ernest Torrence, Lon Chaney and Wallace Beery are something peculiar, character actors and good ones at that. They have specialized in doing one thing well and get a living by that. Mere stars, as opposed to actors, differ from them because the stars have specialized in *being* one thing well. I wasn't sure about Torrence and Chaney until I saw them in strange parts (Torrence in *The Mountebank* and Chaney in *He Who Gets Slapped*). Neither acted, but both tried hard. Yet Chaney in *The Unholy Three* was remarkably good, and so he was in *The Tower of Lies*.

Now for the women. Here America comes out stronger than Europe.

PAULINE FREDERICK is a real actress. Personality and intelligence make up for a talent which is restricted though sound. She uses her hands and her eyes well, and the set of her head is very

eloquent. She also makes use of the pause very cleverly—and she doesn't care a fig how she looks. She has a corner in "Woman of forty" dramas and dominates every film she is in, even wretched bad ones.

LILIAN GISH was at once made and unmade by Griffith. She will never do better than that terrible little scene with the dead baby in *Way Down East*. That was genius. She is an expert in hysteria and often flaps her hands too much. But she does act.

ZAZU PITTS is so like Gish in many ways. In *Greed* she was magnificent. Now she fills little parts in big silly films quite exquisitely, putting volumes into every turn of her head. She must avoid being quaint and grotesquely funny too readily.

MARY PHILBIN is stuck now as a young dream with airs, and is said to be a second Mary Pickford. This is quite untrue. She is a second Pauline Frederick if the strain of playing in bad, boring films doesn't submerge her evident talents. I hope she plays serious parts full of meaning in her free time, as an offset to the curls.

SIBIRSKAIA, in a French film called *Menil-montant*, this Russian girl gave the greatest piece of naturalistic acting the cinema has ever known.

GLADYS BROCKWELL, a past favourite, has got too old to play kissable heroines. She fills minor rôles now with real distinction and I wish

she could have a chance in some well-built large rôle.

FLORENCE VIDOR and IRENE RICH are alike in two things. They look like "real ladies" (this is rare) and they specialize in young matronly rôles. Both are Murillo madonnas really, and while neither of them have first-rate ability, they are plainly far above the average, and if they could only get really good parts might soar pretty high. For her work in *Stella Dallas* I now include ALICE JOYCE with them, actress and lady, too.

COLLEEN MOORE might make herself into a fine actress in time. She has intense vitality and boldly threw over flapper parts once. In the turnip field scene in *So Big* she grasped beauty and talent at once. *Sally* was a comedown. I hope she will persevere and make good.

GLORIA SWANSON distresses me. I suspect she is a first-rate comedienne. She *will* stay a star who tries sometimes to be a tragedienne. She is not beautiful, but this is a definite asset. Few of the women in my list are beautiful as most film stars are beautiful. Won't she show us what she *can* do and play in well-knit comedies?

ENID BENNETT. This girl was wonderful in *The Red Lily*; real expressions, real, profound acting: a good mark to her. I never saw such a dumb doll as she was in *The Sea Hawk*.

I do not consider Norma Talmadge can act

at all. She is quite nice to watch, quite intelligent and tries immensely hard. Nor do I think Alice Terry can. Nor Mae Murray. She spoiled the enjoyment of many people in *The Merry Widow*, and yet it was the best work she has ever done.

Leatrice Joy is hardly an actress yet, though she has more than a mere ability to look pleasant.

They are delightful stars and I'm always quite glad to see them, but I am not deluded.

Mae Marsh once scored the greatest performance the screen has ever had from a woman, with the exception of Sibirskaia in *Menilmontant*, in the trial scene in *Intolerance*. But she's never done anything else any good.

There are many cases of actors and actresses who have given really amazingly good performances in one or perhaps two films and who for the rest have been either undistinguished or else quite bad. Mae Marsh is not the only one of these by any means. Take, for instance, Louise Dresser, who for the first third of *The Goose Woman* gave a performance which, if not perfect, was at least two miles ahead in sincerity and in truth of the usual kind of part played by white-haired actresses. As the gin-sodden old prima donna fallen on bad days she was unlovely, she was dirty, she was repulsive and at the same time she managed to maintain a certain grandeur and dignity. To see her was not merely to sit in the cinema and watch a screen. It was to be in the presence of a striking personality;

that actual squalid hag, living in that actual squalid hut, flinging her empty gin bottles on to the refuse heap, shooping her geese about and raving like a lunatic at anyone who dared to come near her. It was to know her so well that one knew, as no one else did, that in the evening, when she was secure from observation, she would take out her tattered old press-cutting book and finger the golden criticisms written of her in the heyday of her prosperity on the operatic stage. Later in the film, the story was conventionalized and became stupid, and Miss Dresser was speedily turned into an opulently clad and efficient American matron. She immediately lost all her talent and became just like anybody else. But the first half of the film was a remarkable piece of acting.

Consider her now as the Empress Catherine in Valentino's film, *The Eagle*. She looked as much like the Empress Catherine ought to be expected to look as Fatty Arbuckle would. She was manicured, she was pomaded, she was corseted, she was groomed until she looked like the buyer of the evening gowns from some large West End store; or again, like a successful hotel proprietress. She had no single queenly or imperial poise or gesture. She was *very* common and it is no wonder, of course, that Valentino, as the exquisite young officer, refused her rather indiscreetly offered favours.

The question is, can Miss Dresser act or can she not? Was *The Goose Woman* a fluke,

partly achieved by the director, partly arising out of a rather good story, or did Miss Dresser do it herself with forethought?

Consider again the case of Belle Bennett. *Stella Dallas*, which gave her her first big part, was undoubtedly the best melodrama, the best-acted melodrama, and one of the best-acted films that America has ever made. As a girl of eighteen she was alluring, firm-fleshed, hopeful and attractive. As a wife of twenty-five she was more opulent, less refined, more likeable, and in every turn and movement convinced one that she was the same girl, but the same girl who had passed through experiences which had changed her. As a woman of thirty-five she was definitely blowsy. Here again every movement expressed not only what she was feeling at the time, but told one of the effect marriage and motherhood had had on her. She became harder externally, yet managed to make one realize that actually she was more sensitive and much nicer than she had been as a girl. In her scene with Alice Joyce, where she, as the over-dressed, desperately lower-middle-class mother, goes to call on the self-possessed, slender, simply-gowned, upper-middle-class lady to ask her a favour, Miss Bennett gave an almost heartrending and extremely brilliant piece of acting which was at once characteristic of *Stella Dallas* as she conceived her to be, a comment on class distinctions and an essay on motherhood.

However, Miss Bennett is going to be doomed,

it seems, to repeat the part of the vulgar mother with a better educated daughter all her life long. Once more the idiot star system is going to ruin whatever chance Miss Bennett had of showing that she really was an actress. It was very nice to see Miss Bennett as *Stella Dallas*, but we do not want to see her as a long succession of other *Stella Dallas's* for the next ten years. We want to see her as a circus proprietress or a profiteer's wife or as an old Italian countess. Then we should know how good she was. Now we only know *Stella Dallas*.

There are the comedians, Constance Talmadge, Dorothy Gish, Mabel Normand, Louise Fazenda and Betty Balfour. They are in their own separate class, have simply bags of talent and are worth seeing every single time.

None of the white-haired mothers, either the society or the indigent kind, or the ferocious landladies, are any good. They make me quite tired. One actress has the distinction of playing elderly parts with supreme power and her name I don't know. She was the old aunt in *His Hour*. They say she was once a member of the Comédie Française; she is a dream, anyhow.

There are the bathing belles; they correspond to our chorus in revue and musical comedy.

Betty Bronson was "raised to stardom" in *Peter Pan*. I don't know why a female must play this part. But Betty Bronson, whom we shall have with us for ever now, was an example of most all that little film girls should not be. She's

affected and self-conscious. She's not a child, nor is she a young woman. She's a "kid-girl," a terrible thing. Naturally she would grow out of that, but I'm afraid they won't let her. In case she sees this, I do beg she will consider that if she will become a repertory player, take any kind of part and put all she knows into it, *think* how it ought to be played, quarrel tactfully and worm out permission artfully to play it intelligently, she stands as much chance as any juvenile player to become a real actor. But not unless.*

I ask her to consider the case of Clara Bow, who was also boosted into stardom as a "kid-girl" in *Down to the Sea in Ships*. She got, consequently, another lovely part in Lubitsch's *Kiss me Again*, where she was billed as a French typist living in Paris. What effort did she make to be French? Not any. She was just her own dear self. Personally I hope I will never see her again.

Now I blame Lubitsch a good deal for Clara Bow, because he's taken lots of folk and made them act. I also blame him for Marie Prevost. He says this girl is a great actress. Surely, she's only a charming and a clever and an amusing soubrette. But she's another "star" doomed by fate to play only one rôle, and that is the rôle of a successful but not virtuous woman-about-town. She can play that well. But someone gave her the rôle of Camille: ye heavens! She

* Her work in *Are Parents People?* was a distinct improvement, and in *A Kiss for Cinderella* she had two moments of real genius.

was tiresome as Camille, unconvincing, ridiculous. She plays too crafty, too obvious, too light, too heartless a puss for any Camille. She has nothing "glorious" about her, and Camille, like de l'Enclos, Cleopatra, and others too numerous to mention, do have a "gloriousness" and cannot be played by that little pouting, petulant, charming Marie.

This brings me to Pola Negri. She is unique. If only because she put every American female star out of joint, and refused to woo them, and ran her own line of goods bravely in a strange land, Pola is unique. She started, too, the Continental invasion of America. As a player she is very unequal, as a woman obviously very accomplished. In *Passion* she was really quite good, not quite perfect, but having a flaunting, debonair, devilish naughtiness and *allure*, a brand of womanhood that was irresistible. The Americans are either so broadly and dully carnal, or so disgustingly arch when they ape the light woman that they are unendurable (except to women who are patterns of virtue and who therefore find any show of naughtiness, however poor, very attractive to watch). Pola plays the "wise as serpent" parts beautifully. In *Forbidden Paradise* she managed to combine a really imposing and convincing queenliness and mystery with a provocative love-technique which was so perfectly expressed in every slight gesture, in every evanescent pose of her little stately body, that it escaped being in any way animal. And it



Ernst Lubitsch with Pola Negri, during the taking of that fine piece

takes brains to play that kind of part. You have only to compare her with the home-grown vamp like Nita Naldi (strained tightly in dismayingly opulent satin) to see the difference.

If what I have written reads, in places, harsh and rude, I can only state my provocation. I have gone to the pictures steadily since 1913: in 1918, 1919 and 1920 I suppose I went a thousand times (sometimes twice a day). Since then I suppose I have seen another 2,000 films, if not more. I've been a fan, have followed at various times Miriam Lewis, Sidney Drew, Max Linder, Jack Holt, Norma Talmadge, Laura la Plante, and of course Charlie Chaplin. I've followed stars, after seeing them in one decently made, creditable film, and found their next three films appalling, and their own performance in them worse. It seems unkind to say Norma Talmadge is in my experience the most unequal of the really big stars: but I must say it. And I still like to see her; I am not much prejudiced by my own likes and dislikes. I love Jackie Coogan, but I don't call him a big actor. Rudolph Valentino had a talent. Some of his movements were as easy and sweet as an animal's, and he was perfectly the dark foreigner from across the water. I never called him an actor, though I nearly did for *Monsieur Beaucaire*. He could have proved me wrong by playing any part but the tried one of Rudolph for a change.

And my favourite female star is Lil Dagover, whom I would go seven, perhaps eight, miles on

foot on a rainy day to see. She is much better than most of her rivals, but still not quite an artist I think. If I have been bitter, at least I have been sincere.

Constance Bennett, Laura la Plante, Claire Windsor, are lovely to look on and Norma Shearer has real beauty and growing ability. Carol Dempster is being shaped up by Griffith. Betty Compson is being ruined by bad films ; Mabel Normand, with more talent than ten of her sisters, is almost forgotten. Dorothy Gish, on the other hand, after years of semi-obscurity, is flashing out in *Nell Gwyn*. Lya de Putti, strange mixture of innocence and evil, might in good hands give a performance startling at any rate, good possibly. Vilma Banky is a publicity stunt, pure and simple; no better than ten other girls. Georgia Hale—well, in *The Salvation Hunters* and *The Gold Rush*, she showed grace and personality. As to all the rest, their name is legion. Who will remember any of them fifty years from now ?

CHAPTER VIII

Comedians

Where the comedian scores—" Bless braces, damn
relaxes"—Charles Chaplin—The Others.

CHAPTER VIII

Comedians

THERE are singularly few men or women in the cinema who are merely actors, who can play a part irrespective of its being a heroic or villainous one. Consider for a moment whether anyone would accept Ronald Colman as a "bad man," or Claire Windsor as a wicked woman. It is unthinkable. In fact, so far as I can see, John Barrymore and Emil Jannings among the men, and Pauline Frederick among the women, are the only well-known players big enough to carry through a part which is not in itself sympathetic on an obvious, superficial reaction.

This is not only the fault of the players, of course. Largely it is the fault of the public, which is extremely unsophisticated, sentimental and conventional. Once cinema audiences have come to like a certain man or woman in certain kinds of conventional rôles in films where inevitably right triumphs with a bang and the bad people are punished as ruthlessly as in any fairy tale—they refuse to allow their favourites much moral latitude. The public guards the honour of its beloved shadows like a mother, and the fact that in substance the same favourites are often being given in marriage, or out of it, makes no difference. Pure they are and pure they must remain on the screen, so that everyone

can go on and on sympathizing with them and their film adventures and triumphs.

For this reason the comedians live in a world apart from the others. Neither Chaplin, Keaton, nor Lloyd, are essentially bad or good. They are simply people; men, not heroes. A hero may not push a boot into anyone's face sportively, but a comedian may. A hero may not look, even momentarily, an ass, but a comedian may and must. Chaplin can behave most mischievously, Keaton plague his benefactors for an hour at a time, Lloyd upset the nice conduct of a city, but as they are bound by no rules of conduct all is well.

Of course, nothing of all this comes out pure. Chaplin *is* a nice person; he befriends animals and children, is touchingly devoted to ladies. Lloyd and Keaton, to a lesser extent, display eminently likeable qualities. But essentially, the comedians are likeable because they are human and not because they are novelette heroes. There is altogether too much novelette morality in the cinema, particularly the American cinema (N.B.—Pola Negri made her success in German films by defying conventional morality and only lived up to it again by another defiance in *Forbidden Paradise*. Dorothy Gish was her best as the scandalous *Nell Gwyn*). And so we thank heaven for the comedians who bring a little healthy naturalness into the altogether too anti-septic atmosphere.

Nothing, again, is unadulterated here. Take



Constance Talmadge



Reginald Denny



Laura La Plante

Three clever comedy stars

Fairbanks. Though the archtype of all regular fellows, he ventures where none of his offspring dare, and is as mischievous as anything. But then, he too is a comedian. Not wholly. He is part hero and part acrobat-comedian, so he escapes the conventions laid down (I suppose) by the pilgrim fathers, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and by all the penny-a-liners. Fairbanks, in fact, is that much the better for being a good deal human on the screen. And I venture to associate the name of Reginald Denny with that of the charming Doug. He, too, is a regular fellow: but he is no hymn-singing hero, and his films are absolutely first-rate, flashing with sense and speed.

Someone said, in the old days of cubist manifestos, "bless braces, damn relaxes." The comedians are braces. The atmosphere created in a picture theatre by any one of them is definitely bracing and lovely. The atmosphere of artificial mock-morals, created by the average hero-meets-heroine picture is just as certainly relaxing. It is consequently that much less moral.

But let us talk of Charlie Chaplin. There are people still living who have never seen him, but I doubt whether anyone over the age of four years has never heard of him. His fame is absolutely unparalleled.

Charlie Chaplin, the comedian with a bowler on his big head, broken boots on his tiny feet and lines of melancholy on his sensitive face—

the everyman of the twentieth century. Man, not as he seems, but as he feels himself to be, a small, tender-hearted, game person, lost in a hard, cold world where others have their motors and their champagne, but he has only his wits. It is a curious fact that in these days, when we hear so much of young ladies being taken by provident and hopeful mammas to have a camera test, in the hope that they may prove to possess the ideal film face, that Chaplin, himself the presiding deity of the cinematic art, is utterly deficient in the essential qualities for camera tests. He is too small and his feet are too tiny and his head too big. He is hopeless. No official in any self-respecting studio would pass him as fit for work. However, he does very well and had the good luck to get into the cinema before it cut and dried its raw material to tailor's dummy requirements.

The earliest Chaplin films were absurd. I saw one of them recently; the picture was taken at an ordinary motor-racing track, about 1911-12, I should imagine. Charlie "mingled" with the crowd, which was a genuine one, and when opportunity presented itself ran out and got in the way of onlookers, or, especially, in the road of a motion-picture camera-man, who acted that he was taking a film of the race for the topical budget. That was all. Charlie kept running out of the crowd and kept being hoofed back. But a slightly funny thing done over and over again can become extremely funny: once one begins

laughing, all is well, and at the time this picture must have been a great novelty.

Then came the great Keystone days when Chaplin and Mabel Normand acted together. Here the real Charlie evolved. One little film of this period, *The Fatal Mallet*, was revived recently by The Film Society. It was quite exquisitely silly—people stood behind a barn-door and hit each man who entered on the head with a chunk of wood. It was like a game of nine-pins in which the nine-pins themselves took part. Mabel Normand was the heroine. In the intervals of hitting each other to the cold, cold ground, the male characters rushed forth and with frantic gestures each in turn wooed the haughty Mabel, though Charlie, I regret to say, let himself go so far as actually to strike the lady, and that with his boot, in a suitable portion of her anatomy. It was quite a playful tap, however. The long, flowered voile dress she wore had an antique charm.

Everyone remembers the next period when "Charlie" had become Charlie Chaplin and children in the streets sang, "The moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin." Those were the days of *Charlie at the Show* and the delicious *Charlie at the Bank*, in which the half-wit bank-janitor falls asleep and dreams of beating off burglars, saving, and indeed wooing, handsome ladies with ease and art. He wakes as he fancies he is holding his fair one in his arms (it was Miss Edna Purviance, the big blonde so well

contrasted to the agile dark comedian). But it is the weary old hairs of the mop with which he must clean the floor that he is stroking; the burglars were a tangled reminiscence of events of the past day; and the lady is another's.

Charlie's *The Perfect Lady* is my own favourite film of this period. It is, to the best of my belief, the only female impersonation in any Chaplin film. It also makes me wonder how and why Sydney Chaplin, Charlie's brother and business manager, ever dared to play *Charlie's Aunt* later. His female impersonation was coarse and silly. In *The Perfect Lady* Charlie is wooing a girl whose father is very strict. In order to get into her house he disguises himself as her girl friend. Without his moustache, daintily clad in a little toque, tailored suit, smartly gloved and booted, with a pretty little fox fur round his throat, Charlie made an entrancing black-eyed Susan. Anyone would have taken him for a pretty, rather Jewish girl. His prospective father-in-law did, and Charlie flicked him in amorous playfulness with the coy tail of his fur necklet.

But the latest Chaplin period is, of course, the best, though it is sad that his films are so few and far between now.

Beginning purely as a funny man, becoming a rich and successful one, Chaplin began early, as all good comic actors must, testing his own material—his comic talent. He listened in to discover not only what people laughed at most

but what they liked best: this all comedians study. Gradually he evolved a much more richly lovable personality than his early films displayed—as well as a more amusing one. He has identified himself, rather consciously, not merely with the under-dog, but with all wistfulness, all disappointment.

His best films are *Shoulder Arms* and *The Gold Rush*, and top of them all *Easy Street*.

In *Shoulder Arms*, much of the earlier Chaplin is still there—the slightly cynical workman of *Pay Day*, the shrewd fellow shaking a cocktail, when his heart ought to have been broken, of *The Idle Class*. But Charlie, the soldier (and what a Cockney tommy he was!) was presented with a realism and broad humanity not so apparent in the earlier work. His was a far more ageless and universal soldier, in spite of its local colour, than Old Bill, the *nous autres*, the old sojer who never dies, who doesn't want to die, but to go home. He was for the first time completely his own *compère*, who displayed with a witty and hysteria-compelling familiarity his own special and rare beauty, his talent.

There is in all of us, somewhere, a sort of special response, not to crowd-emotion in the ordinary sense, but to that curious quality in individual and crowd alike, which recognizes and adores the beauty of humanity. We are but little children weak, but now and then, like a young woman whose child is dead, catching a flash of the lost baby in a casual perambulator,

we human beings catch a glimpse of whatever elusive quality it is that men most prize in humanity. It is not courage, it is not humour, it is not the diviner kind of common sense, it is not even the pathetic emotion, but partakes of a little of all, and of pan-human sympathy as well. Chaplin expresses this mysterious quality so that we can recognize it. In *The Gold Rush*, for instance, when he arrives in the mining camp and goes, unsuitably dressed as usual, tentatively into the dance-hall, he stands awhile with his back to the camera. Only the fingers of his right hand hanging down move a little. But they move enough to explain that he is feeling what everyone feels when they go to a party or alone into a cheerful crowd—a careful indifference masking an agony of desire to be noticed, taken up and liked by somebody. The point is that Chaplin knows instinctively, and the audience through him knows, that it is *nice* and touching of people to feel like that, not silly or weak.

I am perfectly aware that *The Gold Rush* has been severely criticized and written off as “too sad.” It is an unfortunate fact that so long elapsed between the release of *The Pilgrim* (which was not so good save for one incident) and that of *The Gold Rush*, while many riotous and wholly comic Buster Keatons and Harold Lloyds were shown in the interval, and Chaplin seen after them did strike the public as so much more plaintive as to be comparatively less funny.

Yet there was more true humour in *The Gold Rush* than in all the Harold Lloyds piled up in a heap. It was the real Chaplin. It was incidentally a work of art, not merely a film, and will be enjoyable twenty years hence or more, if it survives, when Lloyd and Keaton will seem crude and trite.

The true Chaplin *is* pathetic and has been so since long before he decked himself out in inadequate and vanishing spats, in order to impress his lady-loves, before he stood forlorn in the road and watched his sweetheart carried off by her rich relatives. It is perhaps true that his very highest talent lies in little indescribable pantomimic actions, of which the best are probably his sermon on David and Goliath in *The Pilgrim* and the dance of the rolls in *The Gold Rush*. But remark that underlying even these there is a bitter-sweet tang—Charlie has not found the world a very kind place, though he knows it is a very likeable one. And at his most rollicking, stomach-aching evocations of laughter it is the delighted shock to see a man so unexpectedly resourceful that makes one happily bellow, as much as at the pure nonsensical abandon.

Chaplin is criticized too for taking himself too seriously, for imagining he has a tragic genius. But he *has*.

And if it can ever be said that one of his pictures is less successful at any cinema the world over than one might hope, then it is because his films are too good, not because of any inadequacy.

No really good film can be a roaring success. How many great writers, painters, poets, or musicians have prospered exceedingly? There is a Landseer in every home, but how many Leonardos? Has the Seventh Symphony sold as many copies in centuries as "Keep the Home Fires Burning" in a decade? It is not impossible for a really good film to make a decent profit, but *The Ten Commandments*, which was awful, has proved a gold mine and *Charlie's Aunt* another. It is the same everywhere—*Tons of Money* made a fortune; *Uncle Vanya* just kept its head above water. It is the way of a democratic world.

To turn from Charlie to Harold Lloyd is like turning from the National Gallery to the Royal Academy. Harold Lloyd is purely a commercial asset, most ably handled by a gang of business men, who manufacture him in a studio. They take a story and work out so many laughs per thousand feet of film. The laughs are unerringly gauged and fairly ingeniously woven into the story, but they do not really arise from the story or from the character of the comedian as do the laughs in a Chaplin film. *Safety Last* was easily Lloyd's best—though the football match in *College Days* ran the goat-like perils of Lloyd on a skyscraper very close. We do step right up and call Lloyd speedy, for his films are fast and joyous like a ride on a switchback railway; before you get your breath they punch you in the laugh department again. *Safety Last* made one

laugh until it hurt. Men and women who had suffered for years with complaints of the kidneys arose from it cured. But no one's life was the richer for seeing Harold Lloyd, while Chaplin by contrast endears existence to thousands.

Buster Keaton has more of straight satire in him than the other two. *Sherlock Junior* was a funny dream about detectives, *Go West* a funny dream about cowboys, *The Navigator*, a comic nightmare about heroes and heroines marooned in the tropics. Keaton is much more purely fantastic than Chaplin or Lloyd, more like *Beggars on Horseback*—a comment on the ephemeral contemporary aspect of American and movie-American life. He derives from the cinema rather than contributes to it, and that is his limitation and his strength. *Electric House* was funny mechanically, the play of a disordered imagination with labour-saving contrivances, already familiar to us through scores of crass comedies about revolving tables, dish-washing machines and lifts. As to the fact that Keaton never smiles, though this is an amusing characteristic, it is merely in excess the attribute of all clowns. Chaplin and Lloyd, too, have set funny faces, rendered funnier by deliberate, or timid, or artful smiles. On the whole they, too, are frozen-faced; it was mere cleverness on the part of Keaton's publicity agent to endow him with that distinctive appellation.

To turn to lesser men—Larry Semon is just

a knockabout comedian of no special ability and Jewish characteristics. He has not a pleasing screen personality.

Lupino Lane on the other hand might climb to high comic eminence. He is full of ingenuity, wit and inspired acrobacy and a child would recognize him for a friend. He, in fact, is more like Chaplin than any of them.

Ben Turpin, though not merely funny because of his cross-eyes, is in a class with Ford Sterling, Clyde Cook and others—useful to inject comic relief into a film, but of no large talent.

There is, however, a class of comedian quite different from the Chaplin-Lloyd-Keaton variety. The fathers of this school were Bunny and Sidney Drew, character comedians of a Falstaffian or Quixotic build. Of these, W. C. Fields is, though a newcomer, the greatest. He has Pickwicks, Micawbers and Marie Lloyds up his sleeve; he is supremely the charlatan who deceives only himself and appeals to everyone by a genial, if not exactly impeccable behaviour. Wallace Beery is in this class, with a dash of heroism. Donald Crisp has given glimpses of comedy (see *The Black Pirate*). I believe these are what used to be called "heavy comedians," but their heaviness sheds light on many a film.

Mabel Normand is the one and only true female comic (for Zazu Pitts is anything but a real clown). Mabel comes in between the clowns and the heavies and it is sad she does not appear more often. She is so gifted that even Chaplin has ad-

mitted that he learnt much from her, as well as from the late Max Linder, and she can carry an empty and mediocre film effortlessly on her shoulders.

Sadder even than Mabel's invisibility is that of Will Rogers. He seems no longer to play for films at all,* though he was one of the few people no intelligent filmgoer could afford ever to miss seeing and I understand that, as one might expect, his films were never popular. Him the great Mr. Samuel Goldwyn has called "one of the world's most infectious comedians." His lack of success cannot, I think, be entirely attributed to his cleverness, for since his name is almost unknown to the cinema public, it is pretty obvious that he must have had very poor publicity and that this lamentably militated against him. He, by the way, was one of the bright stars in the crown I have perhaps somewhat ungracefully awarded to Metro-Goldwyn. Who knows, he may return with colours flying yet!

There is in France a little Russian actor called Nicholas Koline who is a serious actor who has specialized in comedy. Seen in a few films he is remembered affectionately by certain people, who wait undaunted to see him again.

And have I omitted to mention comedies, those curious films one sees in almost every cinema, in which quantities of men, children, negroes, chickens, skunks, motor-cars and policemen, rush about in the hopes that the audience may be tickled thereat? What, too, of *Our Gang*,

* Good news comes that he is to appear in a big English picture *Tiptoes*.

in which coloured and white children do all kinds of mischievous things, which are offered to the public as being funny? I have only one phrase for *Our Gang*: away with them into the utter darkness of the cellars where junk film lies forgotten.

CHAPTER IX

Conventions and Morals

The peculiar behaviour of film folk—Their activity and restlessness—The curious effects of alcohol and other strange phenomena of screen life—The innocent heroine and the wicked vamp—The cinema and public morals—Children and the films—Which are the immoral films—Uplift and lubricity.

Conventions and Morals

THE code of behaviour among fishes is very interesting to the observer. All codes of behaviour seem remarkable to those who don't practise them. I have spent many pleasant moments watching the wading-birds in their home at the Zoological Gardens, hopping, pecking, reflecting, strutting and quarrelling, and now there is the aquarium, most intriguing of all, for the fish is further from us and queerer. But no peep into any liquid tank, no sudden wriggle of fin or tail or gaping of cold jaws could give me so strong a feeling of strangeness as does gazing into that unsubstantial world in which the characters in "moral" film plays have their existence. I mean the world in which they move while acting—not Hollywood, though I mean perhaps particularly the American films; yet all are peculiar.

Of course people are found to behave queerly in films, just as they do in plays, but for different reasons. For one thing there are so many of them, far more per square yard than in real life. Even when we are shown a rural landscape, trees waving and grass bowing to the passing wind, we know that in a moment two, if not more, figures will enter, and quite probably a thousand. It is not unusual to see ten or twelve people in an ordinary room, although in real life I have rarely

seen so many except at tea-parties, dances, or in certain circles where the intelligentsia make talk together, and there seems little enough reason for it on the films, as most of the personages present rarely do more than clumsily register horror or fear, if anything happen. But perhaps the producer lets them appear because he pays them.

Then everybody is always doing something, even if it is only thinking, and then they think with their muscles like "*Le Penseur*." In *Intolerance* the quiet rhythmical movement of the woman who sits rocking the cradle serves as mental relief, besides serving the purpose of marking off the different episodes, because her stillness is soothing after the restlessness of ten thousand or however many actors there were in the film. The directors might, one suggests with all deference, consider the necessity of repose oftener. Some of them do achieve a unity of scene which in itself is static and therefore restful. I remember how pleasant the little passage with posts through which the characters pass and repass was in *Lily o' the Alley*, a Hepworth film of great ambition and some merit from the production point of view, though poor enough in others. This one unifying scene is necessary as much for sanity and for orientation as it is for focus. In *Warning Shadows* the unity of place was quite remarkable. The Germans have done well to adopt this convention, and excellent use of it has been made in other films.

There are films, however, in which such unity is not practicable. In the panoramic film, for instance, unless the producer uses some symbolic reiterated photograph like the cradle-rocking already mentioned.

Shakespeare, whose work I can quote because it usually fulfils none of the ordinary conditions of stage technique, understood this question well enough. His Nurse was not merely what she seemed. Neither is the Idiot in that lovely opera "Boris Goudonov." They bring one back to everyday humanity, they are quiet, they comment, they do nothing. How tired one gets of the feverish activity of all the characters in most films I hardly dare to express.

But the behaviour of the characters themselves is, and perhaps necessarily so, odd indeed. Our behaviour in dreams is odd: violent and unreflective and inconsequential and feverish in the same way. The film is, as I have stated before, really a marketable day-dream and so its figures have the same kind of irrationality. It isn't what the characters are, but what they do. They are, alas, generally nothing but what they do. How can they be, when they are (really) movie-stars?

One striking example of curious behaviour is the rapidity with which alcohol acts. I have seen, I suppose, 3,000 films and I have never seen drink taken save in two ways. Good characters take a sip of wine and immediately get quite intoxicated, in a hilarious or helpless manner.

Indeed we ought to expect this. We know the villain is not offering the young hero or heroine drink for any good reason. One sip of bubbly and off she goes ! Even in comedies the same thing happens. I have seen Doris May most amusingly squiffy, the stars began rushing about the sky, she stumbled about, tables wobbled up and down. But it only took a mouthful to do it. Villains, on the other hand, invariably drain with the utmost rapidity a beaker of liquid, and at once do their worst. Strange that such hardened wretches should succumb so easily.

These conventions are most rigid and most deadening in the American film. I will tabulate a few of the sub-conventions:

1. If a woman tries she can make a man out of any cad.
2. Female scorn turns cads into real men.
3. If even scorn is not sufficient, the woman must take the man on a sea voyage and get him and herself cast up on an island. Having to work for his living will make a man of him, if nothing else will. Islands (if uninhabited) always change bad people into good ones.
4. The marriage tie must *seem* to be inviolate. If a woman's husband is positively unspeakable, he dies before she yields to the temptation of running away with a lovely and good youth.
5. Even if a woman gets so far as to pack her

bag in order to run away from her husband, she has a child who comes toddling out of the nursery in its nightgown, and therefore she does not run away.

6. Husbands and wives, even if they have married for money, for spite, to oblige parents, and so on, must fall in love with each other by the end of the film.
7. However poor a workman hero may be, he can depend on being rich by the end of the film.

These are only a few of the conventions. Anyone who goes a dozen times to the cinema will recognize them, and many another. There are all degrees of conventions. For instance, on the screen, rich people are never seen in their homes except at meal-times; they never sit and talk, or read. Unless they are in bed or eating, they are out. This, even in America, must be a fiction. It is not only the poor who sit at home. Again, it is not true that only wild or half-wild women smoke, though the pictures would have us believe it. Nor is it true that either girls of eighteen to twenty-five and grey-haired matrons form the whole of the female population. The fact that we only see either young girls or matrons on the screen is partly due to the fact that film stars keep on looking as near as they can to eighteen until they become white-haired matrons. But it is also due to the fact that until a woman is a grandmother, or even later, she

pretends to herself that she is a "girl": and the films mirror this ridiculous pretence of hers. The same is true of the marriage relation.

All this goes to show how, in film morality, the good are good and can only act good, and the bad are really bad. There are, alas, no half-tones. Moreover, while the bad may become good, by gazing on their mother's portrait, or hearing some strain of music familiar to them in tender years, the good may never become bad, not permanently bad. No, we know that with Saul they will see a sudden light or hear a voice. The rapidity with which conversion is effected is really amazing. It is as though someone pressed a button. Of course all this is, in a sense, inevitable. The audience will identify itself with the hero and heroine, and the producer cannot afford to risk their displeasure by letting the good stop bad, or letting the fatherless beg their bread for more than three reels, or by letting the bad have any real power over the good. It would affront the self-respect of the audience if he did. But how ludicrous it all is: the fault of course is that such idiotic stories are usually filmed, or good stories filmed so idiotically, without the least concern for psychological truth, that only fundamentally absurd actions lie within the scope of the actors.

The frequent picture-goer must often have noticed the pains taken to spare his feelings. How many times he sees the hero suspected by every one of his associates! But the audience

knows his innocence. How often the heroine looks guilty and yet never a ninepenny seat suspects her. Great ingenuity is sometimes shown, other times it is left to the audience themselves to know where they are. I saw a film some while ago in which the heroine, an elderly woman very badly treated by her husband, runs away and causes her death to be reported to him. She sends him a message to the effect that one of his three children is illegitimate. At the end of the film she had been reconciled to him, but she has never (to our knowledge) denied the truth of her message. Yet I and all the rest of the audience were quite sure she had lied. Why? Because we all pretend that chastity is and always has been the greatest charm of women: we don't behave as if we thought so, but we pretend to think it all the same. Our clever film-producer knows it's all pretence, but he just daren't say so. So he gives us only chaste women, except of course in one or two generally historical cases where the women are "frail," or it was a "great love." Unless otherwise stated, all women will be delivered free from spot, he says. Even when the heroine is detected kissing a young man and her husband or regular bloke protests, and she can only stammer, "You . . . do not understand" (she daren't let on really, because if she did the film wouldn't be so long), *we* know very well that it is really her secret son, or little brother. Oh, bless you, yes. Even when a lady gives birth to a baby which bears a

curious mark identical with that of her husband's best friend, *we* know it's all right ! The nurse changed the baby in its cradle.

Of course sometimes we do get bad women on the films, but they fall into classes and it is always quite clear what they are. Sometimes we see them in cabarets, sometimes they appear looking like wharfside drabs and give the hero shudders, sometimes they are gorgeous and gracious like *La Dame aux Camelias*. These of course always die, if possible while sacrificing their lives to save either hero or heroine. Dead women (women we know must be dead because of their clothes) are allowed to be indiscreet. Historical characters we know were just shocking. Delilah squirms and doesn't wear enough clothes and has eyes like black hell. Salome . . . oh, well, you've seen Nazimova. Occasionally a foreign—oh, obviously foreign—lady is allowed a little moral latitude. But one seems to see the censor's scissors hover. Bad women are seldom ever American citizens, one notes. A notable exception to this was *The Red Lily*, a particularly clever melodrama in which Ramon Novarro and Enid Bennett both gave their best performances. It showed the influence of *The Woman of Paris*—though even Chaplin didn't dare let his fallen heroine have a very happy ending.

The hero is allowed a little more liberty. He may even treat the heroine rather roughly. Men are such horrid things, anyhow. He may wallow among the husks until the orchestra

strikes up "Home Sweet Home," when he toddles back and finds the girl waiting. The male villain, too, has a little more rope than the female villain. He sometimes looks quite a decent fellow and you could really hardly tell the difference. But there's a fortune in a really villainous-looking fellow's face. Antonio Moreno is one of those men who really do look the villain's part. I sometimes wonder if I shouldn't feel a bit creepy if he himself in the flesh came to tea. But this concerns the star-system more than morals.

Every three months journalists spring up to attack the cinema on grounds of morality. Little boys' aberrations are put down to it, young girls' thefts of finery, the workman's lack of desire to work, and so on. This of course is ridiculous. The question of children in the cinemas is a difficult one and I should be the last to pretend that an ordinary picture-house, crowded as it is, showing the sort of film that it does, is an ideal place for young people, specially in the evening when all good children should be in bed.

But the children who do go to the cinema might well be in a worse place elsewhere. The alternatives open to them are the street and the home, both of which are sometimes more insanitary, and much more likely to corrupt than the pictures. The majority of children belong to the ill-housed classes, and are of a kind such as do not go to bed until about eleven in any case,

and if they do see things on the screen very unsuited to their years, they both see and hear things off the screen still more unsuited. A poor street in the evenings is not really very nice, and it is better to see Hoot Gibson defeating his enemies with fist and pistol than to squabble round the doors of pubs and dabble in filthy gutters and backyards.

Besides, if the films are exciting, they at least sharpen powers of observation and give ideas and experience. That they are untrue to life is neither here nor there: so are nursery rhymes, fairy tales and juvenile stories.

Of course it would be a hundred times better were there special picture-houses for children and special films, too. But the picture theatres in most poor districts are already what are called family houses—where only pictures passed for “universal” exhibition are shown, and where any decent woman can send her children and go herself too without scruple. Some such cinemas even provide a “park” for perambulators! One I know of in East London, where the prices of admission are 3d. and 6d. only, and in addition to a serial, the News Gazette, a comedy and a long film, the audience also gets three variety turns, and not such bad ones either. I was there on Boxing Day last year, and when I went in, a prettily-dressed and pretty nimble comedienne was leading the house in a popular ditty and very rousing it sounded. The cheers when a rescuing posse swept through the woods

to save the hero of a cowboy serial were equally joyous, and though the back seats were a considerable way off the screen and one had to crane a little to see, a better or a more decent entertainment for 6d. I couldn't imagine.

Children live in a children's, not an adult's world in any case, and what they don't know doesn't mean anything to them. Grown-ups kissing each other, for instance, they often think a little silly and a little shocking, as we think of kisses exchanged by men, but if they don't know about sexual excitement, a picture which shows a man under its influence kissing a woman doesn't teach children anything undesirable.

As to adults, the case is different. Our elders—magistrates, editors and busybodies—who see so much harm in certain kinds of films and plays and books, perhaps enjoy being unpaid censors. It is quite true that some people derive mild pleasure from certain kinds of amatory films, but what of that? It is a healthy enough experience and really only proves the innocence of the delighted parties. It is also true that a quantity of flirtation goes on in the semi-obscurity of picture theatres, but unless the marriage-rate is to fall still lower, people must flirt somewhere, must paddle in the palm of another's hand and put arms round compliant waists. They cannot all afford taxis, and the country lanes are far away from most people, nor have every couple a drawing-room at their disposal. It is rather nice to see the couple in front of one squeeze

each other when the hero and heroine of a film kiss.

Stroheim is often called depraved because he uses a certain amount of imagination in depicting attempted seductions. Yet never did any film-director mete out more lawful retribution to his villains than Stroheim. The crafty Lothario of *Blind Husbands* falls from a high place and is killed horribly. In *Foolish Wives* his corpse is thrown down a manhole, in *Greed* the murderer dies of thirst in the desert, and in *The Merry Widow* the wicked Crown Prince is assassinated and dies in a dirty puddle in the street. If this is not moral, what is? And if his true lovers, and Mrs. Elinor Glyn's, show some skill in caresses this is all to the good, for nice people do not make love nastily and a little education in the art of wooing is badly needed, particularly by the conventional Anglo-Saxon races. To show the wicked characters as repulsive and the good ones as attractive is very highly moral, and when this is done nothing is left to be desired.

It is the pure producers who, to a very severe and scrupulous mind, sometimes pass the bounds. Of course we know morality has no fixed value. In Russia a film is considered immoral which tends to show what to Soviets appears bad citizenship—luxury and idleness, the capitalist system in obvious operation and so forth. In Japan the mere proximity of lovers, let alone kisses, is scandalous. In the same way in life, while monogamy is accepted as a standard in one

country, it is at the same time a scandal in another land.

But since most of the films we see are American I am talking of Anglo-Saxon standards of morality and possibly also of the finer shades of even this. Now it cannot be denied that the heroines of many American films, set up for our admiration, portray anything but agreeable creatures. Often they merely look unpleasant people, have the carriage and ape the behaviour of women too mercenary to be prostitutes, but actually more unpleasant. They are frequently shown as very deceitful, for we all know the good old wheeze of the girl who has been in some man's rooms in perfect innocence, but who would go to all lengths rather than confess it to her husband. This is silly, for no husband worth his salt would cast his wife out of the house for having been in a man's rooms, if the whole of the rest of her conduct and character were such as to have given him any confidence in her rectitude. We also see continually how a "past" generally of an innocuous but merely compromising nature can play an absurd part in a film-heroine's life. All this fully proves the paucity of dramatic invention of the film-makers, but it shows a sub-moral element, too.

As to the way people behave on the screen, this though not immoral in the accepted sense of the word, is certainly so to those people who identify morality with intelligence. One of the most glaring examples was given in *The Ten*

Commandments, in which the usual laboured mother-love theme all but swamped the boat. The mother, who like all machine-made American mothers of the cinema, looked like a grannie, not a mamma, was a fussy old person who habitually read out of surely the largest family Bible ever seen. Of her two sons one, by an ingenious touch, was a carpenter. The other, the bad one, played the gramophone on Sundays and from so bad a start was shortly building cathedrals out of inferior concrete, he being an architect by trade. The cathedral fell down and killed his mother and he himself caught leprosy from a light o' love and perished by water. Really this all struck me as definitely evil, for if it is wrong to play the gramophone on Sunday, and if mothers are justified in tormenting their perfectly normal offspring with reiterated readings from the Bible out of season, then I do not understand what good is at all.

Even Chaplin was guilty of offence in *The Woman of Paris*, fine and freshly-directed a film as this was. After introducing us to a demi-mondane and a roué, who were both wholly credible and instructive, and introducing them in such a way as to let us deprecate and yet understand much of the motives at the back of their futile lives, he relapsed into cine-morality and sent the woman off to tend little children in a country village, a twist of the plot which was totally unconvincing, pathetic and even shocking.

It is true of course that much of this is partly



in line with the morality of the old popular theatre melodramas which I have praised elsewhere, though much of it is also derived from that awful dissenting habit of mind which gave rise to Nathaniel Hawthorne's horrible book *The Scarlet Letter*. In the old melodramatic tradition humour always darts its clean light over the turpitudes and moral conventionalities of the hero, heroine and villain, but in *The Scarlet Letter* and the films like *The Ten Commandments*, where what is set up for moral is pitifully narrow and unadmirable, no beam of humour ever plays, no shrewd proverbial morality creeps in for contrast.

The fact is that the Americans and English still pay lip-service to a false and silly convention of behaviour invented by mid-Victorian parents to quell their offspring—a convention with useful tags which taught you that it paid to be good, which of all things is the most horrible. A great many people still find it convenient to avoid the trouble of thinking for themselves and go on pretending to adhere to the convention, and the cinema (the stage too) panders to their complacent self-deception. But it is distressing to see it operative—not only in *The Ten Commandments*—except for such of us as can derive a sardonic and illegitimate pleasure out of jeering at it.

A little uplift goes a long way. The audience insists that virtue should triumph, roughly,

because we have deluded ourselves into believing we really think it pays to be good and that virtue is power. The American producers often approach the danger-point in ladling out uplift, however. Propaganda on prohibition, on birth control, or the care of children is not really popular. Of course once you've paid your 1s. 3d. you've no redress, so in a sense it doesn't much matter at the moment what you offer your audience. But there is such a thing as discouragement, and the film business has often suffered from it in the past. Ten per cent. of people who were old original film-fans now abstain absolutely out of boredom and disgust at the shabby nonsense so often offered them.

One particularly bad line of goods which the trade offers is the film which sets out to improve under the guise of lubricity. The censor, we are sure, would never allow anything shocking to appear, but there have been too many titles like *Why Girls Leave Home* and *Sodom and Gomorrah*. The fact that they are silly has little to do with it. What is wrong is that the films are a sell. They bill *Motherhood*, but of course no one would ever dare to show a pregnant woman on the screen, for the Anglo-Saxon at any rate finds many aspects of maternity disgusting. They steal the lure of the old melodramatic titles: *The Girl's Cross Roads*, *Why She Did*. Now it is quite clear what the suggestion is here. But the films are never lurid, never improper: merely in bad taste. So that the people

who pay 1s. 3d. for plain entertainment come out feeling decidedly cross. I remember once witnessing a piece intended to excite unwholesome curiosity by its title, and also to advocate sex-instructions for the young. There was an incident in which a young girl because of her ignorance about sex is seduced (although some people still persist in believing that there has hardly ever been a seduction which was not at least partly desired), and after we see her secretly visiting a quack, and when we have surmised that the purpose of her visit is to procure abortion, we follow her home, where she dies in a fierce and rapid writhing agony in her mother's arms. The audience in this picture-house did not seem at all pleased by what they saw and I doubt if it did any of us much good.

A certain admixture of religion or some equivalent is often ill-mixed, too—both in historical pieces and in modern ones. I saw, some good while ago, a film in which the Holy Grail floats into the modern world. It was in many ways an interesting film, not in itself, but as an exhibition of the American film producer's determination to please. We had a mixture of high and low life, always flattering to both, and a good deal of holy light which flooded the heroine and the virtuous crook who loved and lost her. It was silly enough, but it had "pull" and I suppose I had had very good value for my money when I came out, though the film was shallow and even silly.

CHAPTER X

Difficulties

The cinema's lack of prestige—Its mutability—
Films that cannot be found again—Does the
audience care?—Another disadvantage: Pro-
duction by corporations—Making a film: the
director's impossible task—How Chaplin does it—
A last difficulty: the stories—A suggested solu-
tion.

CHAPTER X

Difficulties

It is rather depressing to realize the number of disadvantages under which the cinema operates. I think the most serious of these is its lack of prestige, the fact that it is not "taken seriously." It is strange that people are still a trifle ashamed of going to the pictures, admit they do so apologetically, while they positively boast of going to the theatre, the Academy or the Derby. Also no single well-known writer save D'Annunzio has, so far as I know, ever attempted or begged to be allowed to write a scenario. Vachell Lindsay wrote an excellent book, years ago, about the cinema, which he likes immoderately. But why has he never tried to learn the job? Even Fanny Hurst has a vivid visual talent. She has been "adapted," but why does she not itch to create? I used to be very angry with Bernard Shaw for doing nothing about it—he could—the third act of *Back to Methuselah* was almost a film, much of *Heartbreak House* is very nearly what's wanted, without alteration. Tackled in person, Mr. Shaw made a remark which really silenced all complaints. He said dryly: "With things as they are now, people complain that my plays are all talk. If they were turned into films people would complain that they were all pictures."

I have come lately, however, to feel that estab-

lished writers of fiction and plays are too much wedded to their own medium to be able successfully to adapt themselves to writing for the films. The best scenarios are written by men who know how films are made : who know what can be done effectively and what can not. And it certainly looks as though this experience of practical cinematography were almost essential to the making of a live photo-play. After all, Shakespeare and Molière were men of the theatre and it did them no harm. So in the film studios will arise men of peculiar talent for this new form, having at their fingers' ends an instinctive knowledge of its possibilities and innate beauties.

All the same it seems strange that none of the younger creative writers of fiction and plays should have wished to wed themselves to this so lively, so novel form of tale-telling, and that they should have been content to allow their plays and stories to be awkwardly adapted to the screen instead. Of course that is the much more profitable way, which doubtless explains it, for artists are a greedy race, we know.

But it is not only the creative artist who takes the cinema unseriously.

The next handicap the cinema as a whole has is its mutability. A film appears, say in the Charing Cross Road, for three days. One hears about it a day too late. Where can one look for it? There is no means of knowing. Those

who know the ropes can, of course, by discovering the name of the company that owns it, ring them up and find out where it is to be seen. But the public doesn't know that trick, and in any case why should it? Can one imagine for a moment that if Nigel Playfair had put *The Beggar's Opera* on for three days at Hammersmith, then moved it to Shepherd's Bush for another three, then to Euston, then to Whitechapel, and so on, that it would have run for more than a few performances? I feel very strongly about it. When I wanted to see *Coster Bill of Paris* again (not because it was an adaptation from Anatole France's *Craignque-bille*, but because Maurice de Feraudy's acting of the title rôle was so superb and the trick photography particularly happy) I just missed it at the Super Cinema in Charing Cross Road, and then again in Bayswater. I have never seen it a second time. I probably never shall. I have never seen *The Birth of a Nation*. I know it is a very old film, but I wish it could be revived for a week. *Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness* by a happy accident I found about a couple of years late at the St. James' in Buckingham Palace Road, where it was showing for one Sunday night only. Now all these films were definite landmarks in the artistic development of the cinema: they were as important to the cinema as the production of *Back to Methuselah* and *The Adding Machine* were to the modern stage. They were of course all, in a sense, high-brow films; that is to say, they were not stereotyped

and they did appeal to a higher mentality than the average film. I am always being told that the cinema is not and never can be high-brow. That is just nonsense (or a misunderstanding of the word high-brow). Charlie Chaplin is very sophisticated, so is *Felix the Cat* (both of them are popular enough) and I call them distinctly high-brow. Very few of the films that have marked a definite development in cinematography during the past years have been roaring financial successes, except Griffith's perhaps, but such films have been made and always will be made from time to time. I am simply complaining of the mutability of films which makes it impossible for many of those people who would appreciate the most novel, interesting, original films, ever to see them. It is important, really, that they *should* see them.

It may be considered that there is not a sufficient public concerned to make my complaints respectable. I am pretty sure myself that there is. I have noticed that all the self-appointed intelligentsia, both of London and provincial towns, as well as cultured people in general, are very much interested in the pictures, go regularly to them, and will take some pains to see the best films. Now the intelligentsia, the sort of people who read magazines like *John o' London's Weekly*, *The Adelphi*—books like Masfield's and Margaret Kennedy's—number already tens and even hundreds of thousands. Where they go, a considerable portion of the

public follows. It is all very well to say that the films are made for the proletarians only and so forth. It is also true that thousands of people not belonging to the poorer classes do go to the pictures and it would do no harm if they were enabled to see the type of film that does appeal more to them than it does to the manual worker. (It is not that the manual worker is less imaginative, but his psychological needs are often different.) I am not pleading that special films should be made for special classes. It is not necessary. Films to suit many kinds of people are made, but no discrimination is shown in the advertising or booking of them, and the films which would suit the sophisticated are not shown to them. It is incredible the trouble people will take to see certain pictures. Enthusiasts go down to Worthing to see *The Golem*, for instance. And I remember, soon after the *Spectator* began giving a weekly list of film notes, I happened to see *Sumurun* (produced by Fritz Lang, I think eight years ago, with Pola Negri who was then quite unknown of course, Jenny Hasselquist and other distinguished players and which was probably the only film yet made that has captured the real Arabian Nights atmosphere). I then enquired from the company that owned it, where it would be the following week, and found it was to be seen for three days in a small cinema in Rushey Green, and there only. *Sumurun* was accordingly put in the Amusements List, not without pretty general misgivings that it would

be little use recommending even a picked and limited public to go for entertainment to a suburb of which none of us had ever heard before. To the great surprise of the staff, the *Spectator* office was rung up by several readers who anxiously enquired where Rushey Green was and how one got there. The musical critic who had bravely planned to go there himself was fortunately able to give the required directions.

It will also be objected that the whole essence of the cinema entertainment is its variety. That is true. The usual change of programme in the middle of the week is an excellent thing ; so is the usual assortment of five-reel films with short comedies, news gazettes, Felix, etc., which make up the normal programme of most picture halls. But see what happens when a Chaplin film is issued ! For a couple of weeks it is shown at the same time in nearly every hall in every town in the country, and the temporary lack of variety in that sense, the lack of competition, by no means causes attendances to drop. On the contrary ! the Tivoli, the New Gallery, the Marble Arch, all sometimes run certain films for indefinite periods and do well with them (because they are above the average film, of course). It is true the economic conditions of these houses are peculiar. But I do wish the percentage of goodish films that get made might somehow be more attainable. I know that sporadic attempts have been made to run high-brow cinemas, all of which have failed. Well, if we can't have

special cinemas for good films, at least there ought to be a sort of Index which the public might consult, giving information of the whereabouts of various types of films at given dates. And it yet remains to be proved that a high-brow cinema run by an intelligent business man (if there are any with the courage) in a lively way cannot exist.

Another disadvantage under which the film labours is the practice of producing them, not by an individual, but by a corporation. Consider, in the theatre you only get the author's work at two removes. Only the stage-manager and the actors stand between you and him. Indeed, as I have already hinted in *Dolls and Dreams*, the actors are only divinely moved puppets through whose mouths the author cries aloud. That is how it should be. But where does your author get through on the film? He creates a story or plot. B. makes a scenario out of it (B. being frequently a jerry-builder's bricklayer who has missed his vocation). C. directs the action of the piece. DEFGHIJKL and M. the actors interpret their parts as best they can, often having only the vaguest and wrongest idea of what it is all about. M., another factotum, arranges the artistic effects, which ought to be in the hands at least of a good modern scenic artist, if not of an architectural genius (the latter is sometimes the case in Germany). N., I gather, is generally a relative of the producer's. O., a very important and much underrated person, is the photographer who, like an entomologist

with his net, captures what he can in his camera. P. is the supervisor who uses his scissors to cut out, sometimes fortuitously, as much of the film as must be scrapped for various reasons, which includes the censor and the custom of taking five times as much film as you can hope to show and then chopping it to the right length. Q. trots in and invents the captions. R., S. and T. have had a finger in the pie all along : they are on the financial side of the business ; they either urge continually for catchpenny effects which get put in often against the director's better judgment, or they annoy generally by urging either for economy or for more lavishness.

Such a process of decentralization is not necessary. Chaplin obviously makes his own films : they have a personal stamp all through as all the best pictures have—one could spot a Griffith or a Grune or a Lang or a Lubitsch or a Seastrom anywhere. In *The Woman of Paris*, though Chaplin himself only flashed through it as the apotheosis of all French railway porters, heavily disguised in a beard, the film was wholly a Chaplin film, full of its director, and coherent. Every good film must have the impress of one mind and one mind only, upon it.

This is all rather depressing. But, on the other hand, I am never so sure of the absolute value and merit, the *goodness* of the cinema, as when I consider these disadvantages, for unless it were a form of expression with a real inherent greatness it could never survive the endless

tribulations which every bit of film undergoes before it is seen, and even while it is seen, by the public.

Consider a little further the way in which the majority of films are produced. There exists already a pretty formidable and rigid machinery for its production : the corporation or magnate wishing to make a new picture is bound to use the tools to his hand : the existing studios, the already hired staff of electricians and carpenters, scenic artists and what not ; he has probably already engaged actors, for a large proportion of film actors bind themselves under contract for a period of years to one producer. He is about to invest capital, and he is bound to do his best that it shall bring in a return. Now, as every theatrical manager will tell you, there is nothing so difficult in this world as catering in entertainment, and nothing so chancy. He is therefore anxious to give the public "what they want." In other words, he is aiming at a target blindfold. Generally he attempts to incorporate in his projected film certain ingredients ; one of these is "box-office appeal," which may mean anything from bathing belles to babies, from highly trained animals to veiled lubricity. It also may include whatever is the prevailing fashion in the way of period settings, or local colour, or the use of vast crowds in the form of armies or mobs. Fashion again will explain his paying an enormous sum, sometimes as much as ten thousand pounds sterling, for the right of filming either a best

seller, or a story which has already appeared in book or play form by a "famous" writer. But fashion is a tricky creature. You may catch a prevailing fashion and ride it to triumph. Or you may even set a fashion as Griffith did a score of times, and Chaplin did in *A Woman of Paris*. Or, and this is fatal, you may follow a fashion too late, and find yourself with an unsaleable film on your hands which has cost a fortune but is unacceptable because the public is already satiated with imitations of imitations of the picture that first set that vogue. It is notable that producers as a rule seldom improve on a fashion once it has been set. The idea of going "one better" in merit is rare.

Then he is likely to want what is called "heart interest" put into the story. Heart interest is almost indefinable, but it means loosely that somebody must marry somebody and give a hope of some "living happily ever afterwards."

Now the producer has a story, actors and a studio. Work begins. A director is found to handle the actual filming. Film stars are given parts which are temperamentally foreign to them and physically unsuitable. The story, let us suppose a best seller, is changed about to suit the *locale*, to suit the stars, to suit the fancy of the director who undoubtedly *can* improve on it, to make it more to the public's mind, or even simply for no discernible reason at all. A happy ending is almost invariably added if it lacks. Then very often indeed, although a large

sum has been paid to film the original story under the original title, the title itself as well as the story is changed. This is generally quite silly and a waste of money. The changing of the story is not so silly if it be done for other reasons. If the original is in the form of a novel, naturally the whole thing must be turned inside out, the cinema has none of the leisure of a novelist and it must concentrate on action, not on words. Again, character cannot be described, it must be made manifest: hence the absurd caricatures of humanity which perambulate film interiors and exteriors. It never seems to occur to the average director to induce his actors to *build up* character by gesture, gait, mannerism and so forth. Cruel men are shown kicking dogs, nice girls pick up fallen babies or are sweet to old ladies, thieves wear mufflers instead of shirts, prostitutes live in palatial flats and lie on divans dressed in metal cloth turbans and black velvet, smoking from very long holders and wearing an expression of vicious boredom and contempt. They also swing their hips violently as they walk. Now all this is in exact correspondence with mediæval architecture and painting in which pious ladies are recognizable because they tend, in their portraits, to the aged and infirm. Housewives wear bunches of keys, soldiers swords, and every person indicates in his dress and his occupation his exact "character." This is the most obvious of symbolism and while good enough as a *pis aller* on the screen, is mon-

strously limited and very childish and unsatisfactory. It would be easy to make it more subtle and more varied and more interesting by having the creatures "act" and not indicate baldly their essential characteristics. This is why Chaplin's *Woman of Paris* was so original. His expensive prostitute, his man about town, were normal, not exaggerated, types. The girl was much like anybody else ; she and her friends might almost have been "quite nice girls" but for what one was allowed to glimpse of their *meiters*. And the villain, the man about town, was a pleasant creature, with no set vices. Happily Chaplin's influence is spreading rapidly, and "realism" as opposed to "symbolism" is becoming daily more noticeable. It is after all only a question of the director taking a little trouble, using a little imagination and making his actors depict what anyone's experience of life leads them to expect—heroines and villainesses, heroes and crooks much like each other to look at, but reacting differently in similar circumstances.

The whole matter of the adaptation of prose works to the screen is in question here. Personally I cannot understand how it is that instead of buying at great cost the right to film stories, totally unsuitable for a pictorial medium and then hacking them about until they are well-nigh unrecognizable, the producers do not spend their money in securing by energetic means original plots not *written* for the screen, but

visualized for the screen. It should not be difficult, with the money at their disposal, for a few producers to engage some ten men or women with a gift of dramatic visual imagination at, say, so much a week for two years, the contract to terminate with a month's notice on either side, and to require these men or women to produce say a rough picture-story every six weeks. If the preliminary attempt seemed hopeful, it could be developed, the authors being trained slowly in studio-technique, made to see what is possible and effective and what is not, in co-operation with assistant directors. This stage showing promise, that is, the story evolved being full of *action*, of suspense and character development, of crisis and solution, with a continuity alike of sense, of development of fact and of certain variable space-time conventions, a sequence from some part of the film could be actually taken and criticized. All going well, the real work could now begin with the actors already having a thorough grasp of their parts, the director, fully cognizant of the whole story and its intentions, its possibilities and so forth, with the author in attendance on him when necessary.* The rest of the staff and experts, script writers and what not, would be absolutely controlled by these two, and advised by them, and the author would write the titles. The author of the story would receive

*This has, of course happened in Germany, in Lubitsch's American films, and is coming into use in England. But it is sadly far from being the rule.

either a sum down when the real shooting began or accept terms on a royalty basis, according to his desires. In this way : (a) Stories suitable to the medium and practicable would be evolved ; (b) Once the filming began in earnest, much time (and never does time mean money so terribly as in a studio with its terrifying overhead charges) would be saved. Then the story would be *all ready to film*, "seen" and grasped by the director, thus eliminating almost all those fumbblings and alterations which nowadays cause armies of human beings to run up wages costs, lighting costs and devour valuable floor space while miles of eventually unuseable film are made, only to be cut out in the end, making the dovetailing together of the more successful portions a long and again costly business which is *never* satisfactory. It leads again to the everlasting addition of sub-title after sub-title to bridge gaps in the action which would never have occurred had all been planned efficiently beforehand.

As to the persons to be employed, they would be of a special type. They would be women rather than men because : (a) women are more visually-minded on the whole, and (b) because the cinema is more for women than men. They would be persons of education, not necessarily with any kinds of diplomas or degrees, but persons such as now swarm the journalist and art sections of the community—lively-minded, curious, inventive creatures ; above all able to project a story

in pictures in their own imagination, and to transfer it to paper by means of very non-literary words, very graphic words, and also by means of intelligible sketches.

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CHAPTER XI

A Vicious Triangle

Producers who are only reproducers—The example of Messrs. Heal—Exhibitors—The inarticulate public—Some things it wants and where it has found them—The public's influence—The unhelpful critic—The editorial attitude—A matter of prestige again—Critics! criticize.

CHAPTER XI

A Vicious Triangle

Now I come to the most obviously tiresome thing about the cinema, that which I call the vicious triangle existing between the producer, the public, and the cinema critic.

Now film producers are business men who turn out films as Messrs. Crosse & Blackwell turn out pots of jam, or as Messrs. Kaiser obligingly manufacture their milanese hosiery and underwear: that is, for money. They are obviously and rightly keen on making a profit. Let us not be deluded by the fact that the biggest and richest producers, the Americans, so often traffic in "uplift." They would not do so if uplift were not a marketable commodity. But the fact that they are business men does not necessarily mean that their wares need be bad, any more than the fact that Messrs. Cooper of Oxford make marmalade for money makes their marmalade anything but good to eat. Films, like press fasteners and garter elastic, fulfil a long-felt want, and we are collectively grateful. The trouble is really that the producers don't sufficiently discriminate in their provision of public requirements and don't provide enough variety. They also too frequently imagine that the mentality of the public is that of an errand-boy or a *backfisch*, or possibly their own. Of their mentality I forbear to speak (I mean only some of

them of course), but will relate the pleasing story of the great producer who not so long ago set about engaging Wagner to conduct the orchestra of a cinema owned in New York. They also too frequently imagine that the film which costs the most money will draw best. Well, it doesn't.

I suppose in time the producers will get better. They must. I enjoyed *Intolerance* so much that I saw it four times. But I do not for that reason want, though I have had, a succession of films in which cities are sacked. *Intolerance* was not good because it showed the destruction of a city, though the destruction was an excellent ingredient. But quite a number of producers have so little intelligence that they think they only have to reproduce the externals of another man's success quite badly in order to make money. The public is not fooled like that. Yet the same thing goes on. Lubitsch made that brilliant little film *The Marriage Circle* which was really *au fond*, good because it was personal; a direct personal statement quite coherently and consistently worked out all through a story. Yet now we are getting numbers of silly imitations of it, films like *How to Educate a Wife* that begin in bedrooms with husband and wife squabbling before breakfast. It's no *good* just imitating like that; the producer must have something to say himself. Imagine, in the theatre world, if because *At Mrs. Beam's* was a success, half the London managers immediately produced plays

about boarding-houses in which an eccentric lady of unimaginable age was the chief character !

I sometimes, indeed, wish one or two American producer-business-men would consider the case of Messrs. Heal of London. Now Messrs. Heal began not so long ago manufacturing good, simple, beautiful, reasonably-priced but not cheap furniture, well-designed, practical, unusual—one would have thought it most unbusinesslike of them to cater for a minority. But the firm has not gone bankrupt because their furniture was beautiful and enduring and individual. Perhaps they had realized beforehand that in a country of fifty million people the minority is worth catering for. Now the movie population is anything up to five hundred million. What a minority may be included therein !

Of the exhibitor, the man who owns the cinema halls, I do not wish to say much. The subject is an awkward one. I have met few exhibitors. One of those I have met is not only an excellent business man, intelligent and very well-read, with excellent taste ; he is prosperous. But he doesn't necessarily book good films for his halls. I have met others, though. Let it suffice that one of these could talk of nothing but his own generosity in providing his public every week with the best that could be procured in the shape of "lovely female stars" (I regret I cannot reproduce the tone of his voice). He had had the good sense, years ago, to desert a comfortable

fried fish business for a more than comfortable venture in the cinema. Who is to blame him for being—well, roughly speaking, uncultured? Another exhibitor of whom I have only heard, who is also very prosperous, attributed his success in the business in spite of his original lack of experience in the entertainment world (he had been a skating-rink proprietor) to the fact that from the first day he opened his hall, no single week had passed “but what he had given the audience pictures with evening dress in ’em.” Well, he was an instinctive psychologist.

But let us come to the second side of the dreadful triangle : the public itself. Chaplin himself in an article in the *Adelphi* some time ago, asserted that the public does not know what it wants. He was right enough in the sense that it doesn’t consciously want anything but just simply films. But the “public” is not a homogeneous mass. And anyhow it does know that it wants to be told good stories, satisfying stories, ones that open new aspects of life to them, and, more still, stories that will put romance into the old familiar aspects of everyday existence. That is to say it wants one of two things : it wants either to be taken out of itself, away from the monotony and confinement of its daily round, or it wants the daily round made to seem romantic.

Because of these two desires, it wants films of fantasy, films set in out-of-the-way places, travel films which may or may not be pure travel

films (like *Crossing the Great Sahara*, which to everyone's astonishment filled the Philharmonic Hall for six weeks and chiefly filled it either with scientifically-minded people, most of whom do not belong to the cinema-going public at all, or with artisans who would never have been expected to like a film of that kind). The travel film may just as well be *Nanook* (which Vilhjalmur Stefansson says is a most inexact picture of the Eskimo's life, but was an exciting film for all that) or *His People*, an interesting though in some ways imperfect picture with marvellous scenes in Jewish households, synagogues, which gave one experience more intimate and more curiosity-satisfying than the most venturesome or lucky traveller could even hope to gain. As for fantasy, here again the range is wide. *Felix the Cat* is fantasy, so are most of Keaton's and Chaplin's films. So are all the trick films, of which the best I ever saw was *If Matches Struck*, a camera gem in which the library matches went on strike because the Master of the House was using a patent lighter. The rebels marched out, match by match, and enlisted the aid of the kitchen matches, which streamed out of their packets on the shelf and began rampaging around in battalions all over the house, stumbling over the enormous pile of carpets, pushing themselves under doors. The happily grouped natural objects, many times larger than life—the china in the kitchen, the jugs and decanters and table legs in the library—became important and

dramatic, and the antics of the matches had a psychological as well as a humorous quality which was enchanting.

Less obvious kinds of imagination can move an audience very deeply—*The Thief of Baghdad*, *Peter Pan* and *Destiny*, for instance. There is an endless store of such themes lying ready either in standard fiction and poetry and lore, or, perhaps better still, in the untapped dream-creativity of future film inventors. The danger with this type of picture, of course, is that the imagination may be expressed out of it in the processes of production. This happened to *Dante's Inferno*, to *The Ancient Mariner*, and in part to *The Wanderer* which was somewhat below the level of the Bible story of the prodigal son on which it was based. It did not happen to *Cinderella*, the gracious eighteenth-century version of the fairy tale produced in Germany, which, though shown and keenly appreciated at The Film Society, has never found one single cinema proprietor to show it to the public yet in England.

Now while it is true that mingled with the excitements, the American films have always kept the realistic touch too—the interest of ways and means, of clothes, etc.—obviously realistic films are comparatively rare. *What Happened Next Door*, a poor film of 1923, was an awkward and half-hearted attempt to dramatize a plain story of ways and means in the kitchen, the

"making do," the disguises, pretences and rehashes, the envious gloatings over grocers' catalogues, the dreams of good fare and rare dishes if only . . . Here lies ready endless material. No subject is too simple, too unostentatious for treatment. All life is dramatic. A ruined hat has sometimes meant as much to a young girl as Austerlitz did to Emperors. Only it must be made to *seem* dramatic. There must be sincerity and conviction. That is where the art comes in. The best film ever made on these intimate lines was *To the Ladies* by James Cruze, which passed round quietly without any praise in 1924. But Reginald Denny's comedies are on the same sound lines.

All the same, one of the reasons for the cinema's hold on the world is that it does always unconsciously tend to dramatize, colour, illuminate and render more worth while everyday existence. Hundreds of films every day show us the poor boy struggling in an unkind city to make a fortune, the poor girl devising a new smart dress out of an old one ; the thousand and one little corners of life which, to a prisoner in them, seem so drab and hateful until literature or the drama picks out the romance and the importance of those little routine lives, so like a thousand other lives in appearance, so unique and thrilling in reality.

But at this point what the public wants comes in very appositely. It does want to feel it is being taken seriously, and that an effort has been made to give it the best of which the producer

is capable. It often feels, very rightly, that it is not being treated well enough, that the producers fling anything to it, and trust habit to take it all the same every week to the picture palace. In one sense, commercially, it doesn't so much matter how poor the inspiration, how trite the plot is. But the film must *go*, it must have life, it must be free from glaring inconsistencies, it must above all hang together and seem to be the real thing. Already the public has made its wishes felt in this respect: maid-servants are beginning to have to look like real maid-servants, not like musical comedy soubrettes: the European aristocracy can no longer lightly be shown behaving like a lot of well-dressed low-down Bowery crooks. This is all to the good. Stupid mistakes and needless discrepancies are disappearing—historical films begin to have not only to be a little accurate, but, what is much more important, they have to catch at the spirit of the times they present. There has been an immense improvement lately in making the normal purely commercial film drama shipshape. Metro-Goldwyn have turned out a number of pictures positively stimulating to watch, by (1) getting the psychology right, (2) dovetailing the parts together, (3) carrying the action over, (4) eliminating unnecessary things.

I suppose the issue between the public and the producer is a pretty clear one. The producer is catering for an unknown quantity. The public

doesn't care at all about the producer, only about films and it is inarticulate save as the box office speaks for it. But does the box office always tell the real truth? It at least changes its tune from time to time. I certainly think the public is very unwise to be as slow as it is to vocalize praise and blame.

There is, however, a third side to every triangle, and the third side to the cinema triangle is the Critic. The critics ought to be the *trait d'union* between the manufacturer and the buyer, they ought to turn light on all the issues involved, make the films significant and help the public to see what there is to be seen in them in a stimulating way. Instead of this, though all the daily newspapers give film notes, film criticisms are not on the whole arranged in such a way as to guide the public easily towards the films which the several sections of it would most appreciate. On the whole, what is written about films rather confines itself to fascinating but unhelpful stories about production, comment on the behaviour of film stars, and in fact, matter which is rather personal than critical.

Two years ago, when things were much worse than they are now, it was possible for the owners of a certain film to advertise it openly as a film which had received the worst press, and yet had the best attendances. Of course it was not by any means a proof that the public is indifferent to what any critics write, for the picture in question had a salacious title, the

promise of which was, as usual, wholly unfulfilled on the screen.

Of course, at root, I suppose it is true that the general public does not care for real criticism of films any more than it does of plays. It is only the smaller special public, which really goes shopping for the best films and plays, which welcomes real criticism. But it is sad that the film critics should ever seem to have no definite opinions of their own about particular films : for it gives the appearance that films are not worth taking seriously.

I suppose even the most famous critics of the other arts write with a bias. That is to say, that though they may have pondered deeply the æsthetic of the art they dissect, still their own personal reactions to certain types of work must colour their judgment. But at least they do judge and their judgment acts as a crystallizing agent, and it makes the public think twice about what they see.

It is again only too true that the public has only lately begun seriously to care whether it sees good or indifferent films, and it is only lately, in consequence, that it has been open to critics to attempt to discriminate. In the past it was no uncommon thing for certain papers to print regularly mere publicity matter exactly as issued by the film producing companies, in place of criticism.

No doubt the critics themselves were not wholly to blame. The general editorial attitude

to the cinema has, at any rate until very recently, been antagonistic. The professional classes on the whole have been very slow to accept films. There are, I know, brilliant doctors, eminent scientists, writers of genius, talented painters, who habitually go to the cinema with appreciation. But, on the whole, I know that it is true that the governing classes have come to the cinema reluctantly—and among the governing classes we must not merely include County Councillors, Civil Servants, Members of Parliament and persons in public life generally: those who control the destinies of newspapers are equally our rulers. The resistance which this class has offered to the cinema has been, I think, greater in England than on the Continent or in America, and is only now slowly breaking down because persons in this category have been forced to recognize the hold which the cinema has over the minds of the people, and the extreme importance of the rôle which films play in a nation's social life.

It was, I think, until a short time ago, true that the editorial attitude to the cinema was on the whole contemptuous. To them, with a few exceptions, the cinema was one of the cheapest and most vulgar relaxations—that and nothing more! And judging by the relative amount of space devoted to football, racing and gardening in newspapers and that set aside for the cinema, it is fairly obvious that even now the English press has not fully appre-

ciated the strength and importance of its rival, the cinema.

It is, however, on the pages of the Daily Press that the vicious triangle has its apex. The producers are misguided, the public is rather uncritical and those who write of the cinema in newspapers do not, on the whole, attempt either to lead the producers with constructive analyses of either the matter or the manner of the films they send us, nor do they so generously as they might, bring to the notice of the public in an inviting way the merits of the best films and the demerits of the worst. And yet it is essential that the public—or rather the small fashion-setting section of the public—should think about the fare that is offered them in picture-houses. Good films there are, but sometimes one feels it is only by the grace of God. The public does not care much more about them than it does about less good ones : sometimes it even shows its dislike of good, but not wholly popular, pictures. The critics will write these down as clever, but above the heads of the public : the producers will retaliate by making stupider films than before. And this is not as it should be. It is high time that our rulers, and particularly our prints, should allow to the cinema the prestige which it has undoubtedly earned for itself.

Once more, it is not only uneducated people who go to the pictures. You will find as many titles sitting in the Tivoli, Strand, and the

Plaza, and the New Gallery in Regent Street, of an evening, as you will in any of the West End theatres. You will ever find society hostesses giving evening parties to see special films, and you will see, when such bodies as The Film Society show a certain kind of selective programme in an intelligent way, that they can gather around the doors of the cinema where they meet as many Daimlers to the square yard as any play or opera can attract.

Yet, even now, a certain something attaches to the name of Film Critic, whereas a Dramatic Critic is a grand and eminent person. As an illustration, consider, were you in the Strand and your companion nudged you, whispering : " There, look, that man with the brown felt hat going into the Savoy, that's Brill, the dramatic critic of the ' Evening Glowworm ' ! " You would be interested, and would no doubt tell your wife in the evening that you had seen the dramatic critic of the " Glowworm " in the Strand, at which she would give you an admiring nod. But imagine, conceive, were your companion to pluck you by the coat sleeve and say : " Look, that man in the bowler going into the Cecil, that's the film critic of the ' Evening Comet ' ! " First of all, you'd be inclined to say, " Why on earth is he going into the Cecil ? " and if you did mention him when you got home, it would not be to your wife, but to the children when you had to invent a radio-tale for them all by yourself. Thus :

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CHAPTER XII

Producers, Directors and Others

By their trade marks ye shall know them—Some advice on producing companies—In America—In Germany—In England—A selection of directors—What we get from each—American—German—British.

CHAPTER XII

Producers, Directors and Others

THERE is often a confusion as to what is meant by a film producer, what by a film director. The terms are used differently in England and America even. But in using the word "producer" I mean such heads of producing companies as Fox, Lasky, Zukor and so on, and I use "director" to cover those who in studios order, control and direct the actual operations—men like von Stroheim, Ingram, Lubitsch and Griffith. The producers are the War Office of the cinema, the directors are the Generals.

Now while it is obvious that, as regards any one particular film, the director is the man of destiny, the one supremely important person, back of him there stands the industrial unit or production organization, and the men top of this are those who ultimately shape everything that comes across the screens of the world.

The producing firms are little known to the public, particularly out of America. This is a pity. The public must somehow be made to discriminate, and one rough measure of films is their origin. Each producing firm has a definite personality, a recognizable quality: by their trade marks shall ye know them. And at the risk of performing an unwanted and unthankful service, I propose to comment on the

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mass output of some of the more important film-producing concerns, American and some others.

It is possible, once one is trained to it, to recognize at sight the output of most of the producers. A First National picture is not like a Metro-Goldwyn, a Fox film differs from a Warner Bros. The public should notice the difference, pick and choose its preferences and not go to a Fox film and complain, when by looking a little further it could have had an Allied Artists' production and complete satisfaction.

Allied Artists is unique. It is a band of picked brothers, not a corporation. It is in fact Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin. Added to them are a few other stalwarts, but the Big Three are the heart and soul of it. They produce their own films in their own studios, and business houses directly under the bosses sit in all parts of the world to distribute their pictures and collect the shekels. For example, when *The Gold Rush* was shown for a first exclusive season at the Tivoli, Strand, the profits on the money paid by the public to see this Chaplin film was paid from his (and his colleagues') London office direct into Chaplin's personal bank account in U.S.A. On the other hand, profits on Mary Pickford films have often gone to back Douglas Fairbanks' pictures, so costly to make and often so good that they are less brilliantly lucrative than they deserve. Neither

of the Fairbanks, however, is exactly poor, although they are in the curious position of actor-producers. Other actors pine to be elected to their company, but there are few stars bright and golden enough to claim to stand in that distinguished throng, the patron saints of the cinemas, Allied Artists.

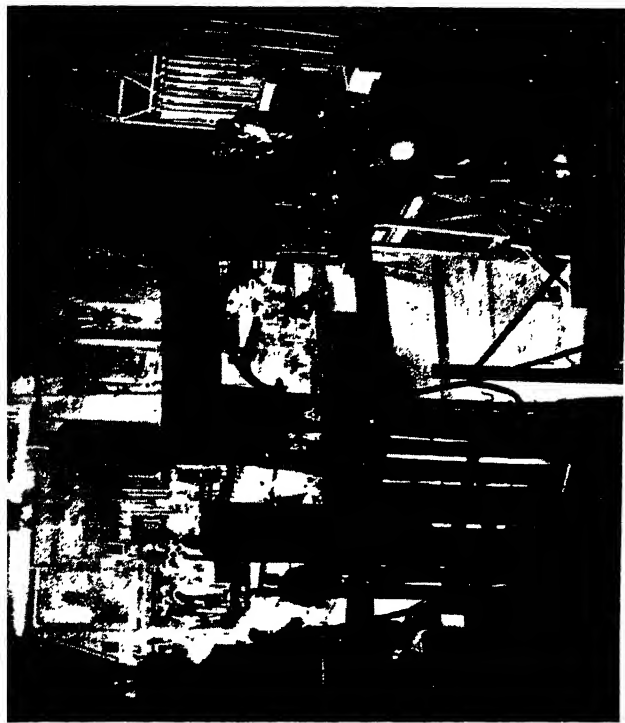
The closest ties of friendship, as well as of interest, bind the little company together. The Pickford-Fairbanks home is genuine and an exclusive one: unlike many movie celebrities, Mary and Fairbanks do not frivol in the public eye, do not turn their homes into night clubs or emulate the most idiotic and riotous behaviour of their inferiors. They receive royalty, ambassadors, eminent writers, painters and bigwigs of all kinds, and the bigwigs are honoured to visit them, for up in their home in the hills above Los Angeles, the Fairbanks represent a monarchy founded on the love of subjects from India to Peru and back again.

But Chaplin, equally elusive and exclusive, is often with them. The three great little people happen to be wholeheartedly and absolutely interested in the cinema. They talk about films with each other, as angels in heaven might converse of innocence and beauty. In the evenings they sit at home and look at their own and other people's pictures on a domestic cinema.

There is all the difference in the world between a serious artist (irrespective of fame) and a

popular favourite. Fairbanks, his wife and Chaplin are, and behave like, serious artists: in that is their great strength. They are their own raw material, and it is with the use of it that they concern themselves. There are no other people of such universal fame who live so unostentatiously, though Lilian and Dorothy Gish are of the same serious order. For all of them have begun at the beginning, and have come through. They are, largely, the history of the cinema as we non-participants know it.

Second to Allied Artists on their high Olympus, I place Famous Players, the immense film-manufactory on Long Island, New York. Famous Players was invented by Mr. Adolph Zukor some time before the war. Mr. Zukor, originally a furrier, saw something in moving pictures in the early days, invented "Hale's Touring Cars," in which one sat in a railway-carriage affair and saw motion-picture scenery go past. He eventually set up early crude cinemas in dis-used shops and warehouses. He was the first person to launch out in showing five-reel films, though his colleagues objected that the public would never want pictures lasting as much as even an hour. He put the film of *Queen Elizabeth*, with Sarah Bernhardt in it, over in America, and with the resulting profits made *A Prisoner of Zenda*, the first famous picture play by Famous Players. In other words it was he who was responsible for the rise of the



A typical Film Studio, with a scene from *Tiptoes*

star system. Mary Pickford, as most people know, left the early Biograph Company, where she had worked under D. W. Griffith, who did not apparently much admire her, to join Zukor and in a short time Mary was earning £100 a week—something to make people's mouths water in those days. This was in 1912. It was Zukor, too, who invented the arrangement by which many films are handled, the manufacturer and the exhibitor of the film alike receiving a percentage on takings when it is actually shown to the public.

Later, of course, Zukor was joined by Jesse Lasky, and by Cecil B. de Mille. Their concern was easily the largest in America, and they built an enormous studio.

In the meantime other powers had been arising. Carl Laemmle built a large studio near Los Angeles and founded the Universal Film Company. The Fox Film Corporation had got going, and in France Leon Gaumont had also established what was at the time probably the most famous of the producing concerns. As to England, which a few years earlier had had the monopoly of supply in America and at home, it is interesting at the present juncture to quote what Mr. Talbot—an authority on the subject—wrote of even the early days of British film production.* He writes:

* "Moving Pictures : How they are Made and Worked," by F. A. Talbot. Heinemann, 1923 (2nd Edition).

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"The making of picture plays is pursued (in Great Britain) along somewhat haphazard lines. There is a total absence of that organization so conspicuous in France and the United States; there is no sustained quality of output, either in plot, direction, novelty or photography. The technical side has been sorely neglected; producers lack imagination, ingenuity and skill; camera artists are not encouraged to demonstrate their ability . . . and for the most part, upon becoming proficient in the pure mechanical manipulation of their instrument, depart to those other lands where fertility of thought is given freer rein and is more handsomely rewarded. The literary side is virtually ignored; the wisdom of searching for scenarios and encouraging promising writers has not been absorbed."

This unfortunately is still as true as it was in years gone by.

Famous Players have two distinguishing features. First, like the other great corporations, they own an enormous chain of picture theatres throughout the United States and Canada, and now they have established one large one, the Plaza, in the heart of London. Through owning these theatres, they are certain of an outlet and consequent guaranteed return of revenue for the films they produce. They of course distribute their pictures also to cinemas not owned by the parent company. They offer an annual output of films to the cinemas of Australia, South Africa, Great Britain, Europe, and in fact everywhere that films are shown.

The second peculiarity of this company is that the production of films in their hands has been reduced—not to a fine art, but to a commercial formula. Their studio organization is superb; the photography of their films polished; the scenarios written with an eye on the box-office—that is to say, combining a touch of luxury with a dash of sex, a spice of adventure. They have contracted to their service a band of actors whose names are more or less known to the public and lately they have established a school for young people of promise, chosen out of thousands of both sexes, to whom, both after and during a preliminary training, they give small parts, gradually nursing them into stardom.

You can tell a Paramount picture (for it is under this trade mark that Famous Lasky give their pictures to the world) anywhere for its clear, rather cold and peculiarly stereoscopic photography; for the efficient, rather heartless turn of its stories, once you have seen one of them.

It is very seldom that Famous Lasky make a really first-rate picture. I would say even that *Forbidden Paradise* and *The Covered Wagon* were the two only surprising films that they have turned out in the last three years. Now, *Forbidden Paradise* was not one of the ordinary Famous Lasky pictures. It was directed by Ernst Lubitsch, who does not belong to their organization at all, but had been loaned to them

by another company. The scenario and script of the film was incomparably above even Famous Lasky's average. Though the Famous Lasky touch was evident in the gleaming interiors of palaces, in the photography, and in the general finish of the film. But in the hands of Lubitsch the acting of Pola Negri, Rod la Rocque and Adolphe Menjou was so dazzlingly above, not merely the level of these three sound performers, but so much above the level of all but about ten pictures ever played; the story was told so directly pictorially and with so much weight; it was so much a comment upon, an illumination of women's frailties, and above all, the frailties of queens in Ruritanian kingdoms, and of prime ministers and elderly gentlemen and of impetuous young officers in general, that I salute *Forbidden Paradise* as one of the best, not merely of the company's, but of all films ever made. Famous Lasky deserve, and have, praise for this picture. There is indeed hope that out of every twenty-five rather mechanical, very successful, superbly manicured films, which in the ordinary way they produce, they may, out of the goodness of their hearts, give us one of the calibre of *Forbidden Paradise* as a matter of course and to show that they could do it, if only the box-office would let them, much oftener.

Famous Players are not merely an organization which turns out films as Ford turns out motor-cars. Because it turns out objects for sale in the

entertainment market, somebody at Famous Lasky has realized the extraordinary truth that a really good picture, whether it is popular, financially successful, or not, gives the whole cinema an injection of new blood, starts up in the heart of the public new reactions, and is altogether, quite apart from its direct commercial value, a very definite asset to the cinema and to the producing company concerned in particular.

They believed, I am sure, that *Peter Pan* would be another fine film. Unfortunately they misjudged the appeal of Barrie to those who have not been drawn into adoring him. Barrie has nothing much to say, and *Peter Pan* showed out his weakness. It was not a good picture, though exquisitely produced, because Barrie was not big enough.

Now, *The Covered Wagon* was another sort of picture altogether. There the producing company had a good stock subject and treated it as it deserved to be treated for the first time. Note that Paramount pictures are not usually of the *plein-air* school, save in this one American pioneering tradition. While there have been many imitations of the film, it will always remain to the public a pleasant memory of the living history of America ; of real men and women—not film stars—who, drawing the wheels of their bullock carts over the graves of their dead, set their faces westward with the majestic optimism and courage of the Israelites of old.

I want to say something next about Warner Bros.—the curious creatures !

It is true that Warner Bros. have made some bad pictures, but, generally speaking, they have erred on the side of pretentiousness and a sort of amateur art for art's sake impulse, not out of downright naughtiness. They made a film called *The Lover of Camille*, and it was poor ! People are no longer interested in prostitutes ; they no longer find them very moving ; they no longer weep at their deaths, and the picture was not calculated to revive the outworn Magdalene complex. They cast Monte Blue as the great actor Debureau—Guitry once played it. Monte Blue was not at all convincing.

But let us not forget that it was Warner Bros. who were able to make *The Marriage Circle* which—it is an old tale now—revivified domestic comedy in America, and who did try at least to make better pictures, even though they did not always succeed (they certainly meant *The Sea Beast* to be good in spite of the rubber whale ; *Beau Brummel* was a good picture ; *Main Street*, though not Sinclair Lewis, was nearly a good picture). They were able to do all this because of one great contributory cause.

Warner Bros. are the sole owners of pictures of *Rin Tin Tin*, the dog.

The money that Warner Bros. make out of their *Rin Tin Tin* pictures is almost enough to

float a battleship. *Rin Tin Tin* makes it possible for Warner Bros. to give us films like *The Marriage Circle* and *The Sea Beast*. We all learn to write in our copybooks, "The dog is the friend of man." In this case the copybooks are right.

Curious Warner Bros., who so sincerely and so blindly want to make better pictures. And sometimes, because perhaps the heavens reward the man of good intentions, the critic is compelled to tear a few laurels with hands both fierce and rude and sprinkle them on the devoted heads of the two Mr. Warners.

Warner Bros.' photography, by the way, is good. It is less rounded, less hard than Paramount photography, but equally it does not obtrude itself and is very nicely managed.

Monte Blue, Mat Moore, Dorothy Devore, Willard Louis, Marie Prevost, Florence Vidor, all first received the Good Conduct Medal for their acting whilst with the Warners.

The Universal Film Company, known here as European, has, instead of *Rin Tin Tin*, a menagerie of performing animals. It has bears, leopards, elephants, wolves and above all lions. They come into Universal films whenever it is possible for them to come in—and at other times! Universal also make a habit of using a great deal of the permanent wedding-cake architecture they have in their studios as a background for one or more of "the greatest films"

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ever made. It is impossible to distinguish one from the other, except that each is worse than the last. But—and this is a very serious but—Universal are responsible for the comedies of Mr. Reginald Denny. Now, the comedies of Mr. Reginald Denny are very comic. They are also well photographed, perfectly acted, superbly timed, fast moving and altogether what is called one hundred per cent. box office value. They exhilarate as neatly as they make one laugh.

Now there are those who have regretted that the Universal Film Company have found it necessary to make such films as *Flaming Frontier*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Chip of the Flying U*, and *Lorraine of the Lions*; but, whereas Warner Bros. keep *Rin Tin Tin* to nurture Lubitsch, so Universal keep their menagerie of wild animals, their imposing architectural structures, their inane spectacular productions, in order to provide for Mr. Reginald Denny, which is exactly as it should be, for Mr. Reginald Denny is the kind of thing that the cinema most needs. His films are as funny and as well made as those of Constance Talmadge. It is criminal to miss seeing a single one of them, and that is that! See every Reginald Denny, would be my advice, but do not hasten to see other Universal films, unless it be the rare *Goose Woman* and *His People*.

Let us jump quickly to Fox Film Company. Fox films have always specialized in attempting

to rouse the tender emotion. In Fox films there is invariably a baby in a clothes basket, forgotten while its parents quarrel ; kittens in a top hat before the hero strikes the heroine ; flowers before the wife tells her husband that a little stranger is due, and, in fact, any sort of object that makes a simple audience go " Oh ! " is interpolated by the Fox Film Company into its films in order to overcome a slight inability to construct its films in a proper way. That is to say, continuity is not a strong point of Fox Film Company.

On the other hand, in spite of the ridiculous stories that they film (am I wrong or did they not do *Dante's Inferno*), it is a curious reflection that, just as Universal have their Reginald Denny, so the Fox Film Company have their Mr. Tom Mix. Mr. Tom Mix is a great person. I am not speaking of him, as it were, in his mundane aspect, nor of his silver-plated six-seater, nor of his hand-cut twenty guinea a pair riding-boots, nor of his marvellous clothes, nor of his even more marvellous world-famous hats. I am talking, of course, of the Tom Mix of the cinema. He whom husbands tear their wives from half-cooked suppers to see. He whom Bernard Shaw likes. All Tom Mix films are good, though some are better than others. They are exciting, they are well constructed, they are full of high spirits, speedy action, and are made in the best heroic tradition.

I feel I do not know where I am with the

next—and a very large producing concern—the Metro-Goldwyn Corporation. I am inclined to believe that on the average Metro-Goldwyn produce more good pictures than anyone except Allied Artists, though this may be prejudice, because, if in doubt, I myself always choose Metro-Goldwyn pictures, those prefaced by a lion trade-mark.

This is a concern almost greater than Famous Players, with another immense efficient organization, with bands of performing stars, with armies of workmen, and regiments of experts. But I cannot help feeling that their output is on the whole less cut and dried than that of Famous Players. For instance, Metro-Goldwyn once went mad and let von Stroheim produce a film called *Greed*. It was—oh, how enormously only they know!—a failure. It was not merely that people did not like it: they positively loathed it. That is to say, it was a superb and grim film of reality, incomparably produced (though, of course, with von Stroheim's usual and characteristic fault of formlessness), perfectly acted and so terribly moving that it upset one as much as sitting through three Greek tragedies to see it, and unfitted one for work for several days. No doubt it was as a punishment that Metro-Goldwyn got von Stroheim to produce *The Merry Widow*, a film in which the inherent badness of the story, the inadequacy of Miss Mae Murray struggled with the unquenchable genius of von Stroheim to make a picture which

was successful, in part good, and incidentally the last that von Stroheim made for that company.

On looking back over the last year or two again, it does seem as though Metro-Goldwyn have produced a good many sound films. For instance, there was *Scaramouche*. There have been the Buster Keaton comedies. There has been *The Unholy Three*, that quite first-rate crook film of such tense dramatic value, and the much less good, though more popular *He Who Gets Slapped*, which at least was intended very sincerely to be an artistic production.

Then we have also had *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *Ben Hur*, *Romola*, *The Big Parade*, *The Merry Widow*, all films very much above the general level, all with the distinctively tender Metro-Goldwyn photography, and with a certain kind of intelligence immanent in each of them.

It is this firm which has made Lon Chaney more than a contortionist, Jack Gilbert the hero of the hour, Norma Shearer the coming womanly woman of the cinema.

First National, another big firm, has less character than Metro or Famous. The best film it ever handled was *Abraham Lincoln*, but it was not produced by First National. I think *So Big* was the next best—another character study which (like the *Goose Woman* and many another) went all wrong at the end, but was serious and beautiful at the start. First National are rather middle-

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class, without the gusto of more vulgar concerns, without the finish of more exquisite ones. Their films are less gracefully made on the whole, less charmingly photographed than Metro, less perfectly sure-fire than Famous. But, with a good director, they turn out excellent stuff like the Constance Talmadge comedies, which are first-rate. On the other hand, with *The Sea Hawk* and Frank Lloyd directing, they absolutely surpassed themselves in badness. It was dull—in spite of its story—and miserably acted.

The Ufa concern in Berlin is the one really large, efficient film-making business on the Continent. Early in 1926 considerable excitement was caused by the news that Ufa, unable any longer to continue paying the enormous rate of interest on the loan it had contracted with the Deutsche Bank, had negotiated a substantial loan from Famous Players and Metro-Goldwyn at a much lower rate of interest, and had made in exchange certain arrangements with these American producing concerns to take their products for Central Europe and to give the best Ufa films, in return, for the American market. The indications at the moment are that Ufa made too many good films and not enough popular ones, and that the big American concerns had realized the importance of German producers. Unable to import wholesale everybody concerned in motion picture production in Germany to the States, Famous Players and Metro saw, in making the financial arrangement, an opportunity of

arranging to produce certain films in Germany themselves, where labour costs are lower and certain kinds of studio facilities better than any in America, and at the same time of getting the services of some of the best Ufa directors, camera men and technicians. At the same time they were able to arrange for the handling of their own pictures in all Ufa's Central European cinema pictures, and Ufa in return received cheaper money, and a meagre outlet, which is highly desirable, in the American market.

It is not impossible that in time the production of pictures might become a really international concern, in which each country should produce its own pictures with an eye on several foreign markets and an arrangement for releasing their best pictures in those markets, at the same time permitting foreign producers to make such pictures as they thought good in the home studies. This development is indicated in England.

Any big film made by Ufa stands a very good chance of being an exceptional one; the best have been *Vaudeville*, *The Last Laugh*, *Caligari*, *Nju*, *Destiny*.

There are other companies in Germany which have produced some startling films. *The Street*, for example, was made by Stern Films, and *Warning Shadows* by a firm unknown. All these films are remarkable for the fact that they were made as well as the exceptionally intelligent people who made them could contrive, and that they emerged during a difficult time with colours

flying from a bulk of Continental productions not on the whole even up to normal standards. If these few exceptional films survived—they continue to survive after even several years and wear better than anything except Chaplin—it is because they were not made in the fashion of the moment, or with a desire to tickle the feeble fancy of remote rustics. They were made, that is to say, seriously, with a respect for the potential capacity of the cinema as a new form of expression. The average Continental output is abysmally bad—films seen haphazard in French, German and other Continental cinemas are beyond the dreams of stay-at-home English people, so garish, so crude, so unutterably banal they are.

The creative impulse that once ran so high in France has dwindled sadly. Until of late but few films of quality have come from Gallic studios. The French producing companies mean almost nothing.

Mercanton, who is a producer-director, is known for his *Two Little Vagabonds* and other Elephant and Castle output. Films-Albatross gathered round them a band of exiled Russians and made a few pictures worth looking at, like *Kean* with Mosjoukine and some others. I forget now who actually financed *Violettes Imperiales*, with Raquel Meller, the incomparable *disease*, as heroine. It was a film of distinct character, typically French with French virtues, made in a lively and sympathetic way with rather a touching story and a period *decor*, which was

unique and appealing. But this picture was considered excruciatingly funny, though it was a tragedy, by the great British public, because the heroine was wooed by a young gentleman who—a very Adonis in the France of 1870—looked to modern British eyes so namby-pamby, so very cold, so soft, that they could not take seriously the fact that any lady could come to care for him, and when he kissed her, audiences laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks.

Another French film, *Crainquebille*, was good partly because the story afforded a character study of middle-age in which the French are peculiarly skilled, thanks to the State theatres which train men to act until they are quite old and then let them play parts that suit them. The actor, de Feraudy, gave an astonishing character study in this film and it was also distinguished by a lively and appealing photographic treatment during the trial scene of the old befuddled man. Marcel L'Herbier made one fine film of Pirandello's *Feu Mathieu Pascal*, again with Mosjoukine and with Lois Moran before she was known.

But, generally speaking, French films are interminable, without any shape to the plot, without economy in the direction, and played by actors so typically French as to be somewhat unacceptable to audiences in other countries, accustomed to a diet of American faces only.

A few films are made in Spain, but I have never

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yet met anyone who has seen them outside that country.

In Sweden the creative impulse has not so much died down as been bled away, though once Swedish films were famous, specially in England. The last film of any importance, as far as I know, made in Sweden, was *The Atonement of Gosta Berling*, made in 1923-24. Like all films of the same nationality, it shows a gloomy and unusual subject, full of sincere passion and conflict, and with the fine sombre photographic quality peculiar to the Scandinavian cinema. Now the producer of this film has gone to America and a great concourse of Swedish artists followed him there, all of whom are making good but as Americans—and with no peculiar national flavour. It is obvious that the Swedish vintage does not travel, *Seastrom's The Tower of Lies* being an exception to this.

Russia, though the fact is not generally known, is a country in which at the moment film production is flourishing. The Soviet, wiser and more paternal than many Governments, has a great care of the mental food given to its subjects in the cinemas. Many American films are imported, but veterinary work on these is very extensive. In many cases American films are entirely retitled, so that the plot becomes very different from the one planned by the American producer.

Chaplin and Fairbanks are immensely popular, but films which show a luxurious life, films of



Scene from *The Station Inspector*. (From the story by Pushkin.)
One of the new Russian films of the non-propaganda type

rich people, ball-rooms, extravagant suppers, opulently clad women and so forth, are banned absolutely, unless the opulence can be made to seem immoral.

On native production also the Soviet keeps a firm grasp. It is principally concerned in making films which will educate cinema audiences in the desired Soviet tradition ; that is to say, they make films in which the bourgeois is always bad and the workman always the hero. A special class of film is made for the outlying villages, which either have State-supported cinemas or are visited by temporary cinemas on wheels. These teach the peasants, in surely the handiest form ever invented for illiterate people, lessons of hygiene, methods of agriculture, and also entertain them with films which are definitely edifying from the Soviet point of view, however much they might be detested outside the confines of the Republic.

The only post-war Russian films which have so far been seen in England, or, I think, in America, are *Polikushka*, which was put on in London at a cinema near Buckingham Palace during the last General Election, and *Morosko*, a folk tale. The story of *Polikushka* as Tolstoi wrote it was faithfully translated into a simple, extremely moving film, in which Moskwini, perhaps the most famous of all the Russian actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, played the part of the peasant. It was one of the best pictures which we have had in England ; comparable

in form to the American *Abraham Lincoln*, the German *The Last Laugh*, and the English *Livingstone*. The film whetted one's appetite for more Russian pictures. There have been rumours that others would be forthcoming, and though no doubt they would have to be severely censored, very much changed by retitling and only at first offered as curiosities, it sounds very much as though two or three films which have already been produced in Russia would delight the small intelligent audiences in England and America could they only be made available.

The trouble is, of course, that though not intended as Bolshevik propaganda, Russian films like *Ailita*, *His Call*, and *The Station Inspector*, are so soaked in the peculiar political colour now prevailing in Russia that they would probably be regarded here as emissaries of red ruin. This is unfortunate. The Russians have many of the finest actors in the world, naturalistic actors, peculiarly suited to the cinema. The Russians also feel something peculiarly modern and suitable in the cinema, just as the Germans do. They are willing to experiment and the bogey of "entertainment value" does not trouble them.

At the present moment Fritz Lang, the well-known German director, is going to Russia to produce films there, and I am quite certain that before many years have elapsed we shall come to regard Russia as one of the sources of serious and important pictures.

It seems rather late in the day to go over again the gradual and more or less unnoticed decline of British films and the pretty general realization among the ruling classes during 1925 that British films were few and far between and that a wise Government would not gladly allow three million of its subjects a day to see subtly penetrating motion pictures of almost wholly American origin. The Americans have never been a humble race ; they are very pleased with themselves, very glad that they have so many motor cars, so many millions, and that everything is going on very finely for them. This cheerful attitude to their own prosperity is not exactly disguised in the motion pictures which come from that country—one would hardly expect it to be.

Now, not only does England see almost wholly American films, but so do South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The English-speaking peoples of the world know that American motor cars go ; they know what sort of boots and clothes smart American people wear. The result of all this is that when it comes to buying, they are more inclined to buy motor cars and boots from America than from the Old Country. At the same time, the non-English-speaking countries of the world are also being perpetually impressed by the activity of the Americans, through the cinemas. This also is no good to Sheffield, Coventry and other places where, in spite of what one might judge through the cinema, goods are still manufactured on English soil.

But it is not merely a question of trade. The fact is that the ruling classes of England cannot but begin to feel that the cinema has denationalized the proletariat or whatever class it is that goes to the cinema of this country. It is true no one can view with equanimity the fact that we come very near to showing that we are an unprogressive race. There was a time when England was supreme in the cinema and this gives us the courage to feel that we might get back a great deal that we have lost.

Not wishing to hit those who are down, I will not say very much about the existing English film companies, for I have already expressed the opinion that many English firms are still making films in an antiquated tradition in an antiquated studio ; forming my opinion of course on the pictures which they put out.

The Gaumont Studios are of course like Pathe, chiefly known for the News Pictorials which they issue ; of the dramatic films made by Gaumont too few are up to average American standard, either in interest, acting or construction.

British Instructional Films, who are affiliated to the Stoll Company, have specialized in documentary films, a department of cinematography in which England is still unbeaten. Pictorial records of the war, part authentic contemporary photography, part reconstructed, like *Xpres* and *Zeebrugge*, have made B.I.F. extremely respectable among the English producers, although unfortunately the films have little appeal to coun-

tries outside the British Empire. Many of this firm's nature films are the loveliest things imaginable.

Gainsborough Pictures, Ltd., I cannot help feeling, is the most lively of the established native concerns. They have made some pictures which are really entertaining and which have proved a success both in England and abroad with *Woman to Woman* and *The Rat*.

For the making of pictures in England is in this position : you cannot afford to produce big films for the home market alone, because it costs too much money in proportion to the maximum return. Unless you can make pictures which will go in America, and on the Continent, you cannot spend enough money to be efficient. Gainsborough Pictures have attempted to solve this problem.

A new creation is British National Pictures, which, under the control of an American of considerable experience in the business, is erecting up-to-date studios such as are badly needed in this country. Great expectations are held of their Dorothy Gish productions.

Judging by the somewhat inglorious recent record in England of the theatre, I should not be too optimistic of the future of British film production, but, speaking as a film fan, I am gradually beginning to feel that the theatre is in some respects a relic of the past, and that the fact that there is undoubtedly in England, both inside the trade and out of it, an increasing number of

young persons who are excited by cinematography means we shall yet live to see films on which the good old sign "Made in England" may be stamped without trepidation on the part of those who value the prestige of this country.

II

The work of any of the film directors is at least as distinctive as the produce of any of the great companies.

Until some years ago I suppose the only well-known film director was D. W. Griffith. Now I think the public are familiar with the names of Cecil B. de Mille, Rex Ingram and Lubitsch. There are others who are known to many, if not all, film-goers. These are von Stroheim, Marshall Neilan, Henry King, James Cruze, Tod Browning, King Vidor, Herbert Brenon, Fritz Lang, E. A. Dupont and perhaps one or two others. As a matter of fact, by choosing the producing concern and then choosing the director, any member of the public can be pretty certain of getting the kind of film he wants nowadays, for, deny it who will, there is more variety in the cinema, particularly since the advent of the Germans, than there has been at any time during the last ten years. But Griffith, the old-timer, is still with us. His development has followed a peculiar line, which, it seems to me, is a line which all directors of personality and talent are likely to be forced to follow. Griffith, that is,

was the great creative mind on the direction side of picture-making in the early days. He established himself in the public mind ; he made great pictures such as *Judith of Bethulia*, *The Birth of a Nation*, *Broken Blossoms*, *Intolerance*. Then he began to repeat his faults, and not merely failed to acquire new virtues, but even to lose grasp on those which he had. He seemed to have been overcome by his own success : he seemed to have lost that aptitude for curiosity and for experiment which is the first necessity of the actual maker of films. He began making pictures which were worse and worse. His *America* and *Isn't Life Wonderful?* were not merely bad : they were boring. Griffith fell on evil days ; he lost money ; he was not able to afford to produce his own pictures as well as direct them. He lowered his flag and joined the Famous Players organization, for whom he is now working. Griffith, I feel sure, hadn't when he made *Isn't Life Wonderful?* seen any film for five or six years. That is to say, he may have physically seen them, but they had meant nothing to him. He knew he was a great director. He didn't think he had anything to learn from anyone. He didn't learn anything. He remained in technique, and in his judgment of what the public wanted, exactly where he had been at the moment of his greatest success (though one must admit in justice that *One Exciting Night*, a ghastly bad film, was, from a financial point of view, one of the most successful he ever made). It was not until he became the

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servant of others, it was not until he joined that unparalleled film organization on Long Island, not until he was given a story and told to make the best film he could out of it, that Griffith pulled himself together and made films as films are made to-day. It is true his *Sally of the Sawdust* was melodrama mingled with farce. It is true that it was a little crude in places and a little sloppy in others ; but it was a picture that moved the audience, which made it laugh and cry, and, what is more, a picture which brought to the cinema a new and highly talented comedian in the person of W. C. Fields, long of the Ziegfeld Follies.

Sally of the Sawdust was not by any means a bad picture. Griffith, no longer the lone mountain eagle brooding over the heights of moving picturedom, but merely one of the more experienced, more sob-stuff creating directors working in America, may yet prove himself again one of the best film makers.

I do not wish to speak here of the part that Griffith played in film history, for it is too well known to need retelling, and others who know the events intimately have told it much better than I could. But if Chaplin, Fairbanks and Pickford are the presiding deities of the cinema on the acting or star side, Griffith is the ruling planet of the birth of motion picture production and will remain so as long as people go to the pictures.

Talking about von Stroheim is like talking about caviare. (Some people have tasted it ;



Erich von Stroheim, directing his masterpiece *Greed*

some who have, detest it. It is expensive.) Von Stroheim used to play wicked German officers in D. W. Griffith's films produced during the war. He first became famous through producing and acting *Blind Husbands*, a picture which at the time it was made was revolutionary, not merely for the acting of von Stroheim himself, but generally from a production point of view. Stroheim's own acting as the callow, carnal Austrian officer on holiday, with just enough energy to attempt to seduce any woman he met, gave a performance which is ineffaceable.

In *Foolish Wives* he gave another performance of rather the same kind, which was even fuller, more intelligent and better, while the film itself was a distinct advance on his first production.

Then he began to make *Merry-go-round*, in which little Mary Philbin first caught attention, but it is said he quarrelled with the firm controlling him, and not far through in the picture he was sacked and someone else put in to finish the film. The film began better than it ended.

Then, for some unknown reason which has yet to be, and ought to be, divulged, Metro-Goldwyn thought they would have von Stroheim make a film out of Frank Norris's novel *McTeague*. They gave him *carte blanche*: they gave him Zazu Pitts as heroine and Gibson Gowland as hero, not because, one feels quite sure, they themselves regarded either as a hero or a heroine, but because von Stroheim chose them for the parts he had in mind.

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I have already said too much about *Greed*. It was a film which left an undeniable effect—favourable or unfavourable—on everyone who saw it.

But what one really wants to know is, why on earth Metro-Goldwyn let him make the picture? Everyone should thank their stars that the company did, but it was certainly a very extraordinary thing to do.

A director who has just gone up to the top of the class is Henry King. It is a long time ago now that King made *Tol'ble David*, a simple character study, extremely well managed and acted with Barthelmess as the hero. It was not a commercial success, though the more intelligent film fans still talk about it with affection. The succeeding films made by Mr. King were of no particular interest until he joined Mr. Goldwyn's organization and directed *Stella Dallas*, a picture fit to rank with any. One cannot but reflect that though a good director is essential for making a good picture, even a good director can only do so when he is given encouragement, latitude and good material. It would be untrue to say that any Henry King picture is worth seeing, though it is apt to be.

On the other hand, though James Cruze has not, as far as I know, been hailed by the more intelligent critics as a great director, any picture which he makes is generally worth seeing. Good as he is at outdoor stuff, he is best at American domestic comedy, such, for instance, as *The*

Goose Hangs High and *To the Ladies*. Cruze practically cannot make a bad picture.

Then there is Tod Browning who made *The Unholy Three* and *The Blackbird*, although the latter was only in essence a repetition of the first. Browning has a peculiar gift for managing dramatic suspense, only rivalled by some of the Germans, though achieved by methods less obvious than theirs. He has whatever it was made Stevenson a notable writer in spite of his being a very second-rate mind.

Then there is the case of Lubitsch. I understand that Lubitsch got into pictures more or less by accident, acting under Reinhardt in Germany. A chance arose one fine day. He showed he had some inherent ability for film direction and very soon he was making pictures like *Sumurun*, in which he acted himself the part of the hunchback, and *Passion*, a film with Pola Negri, that made his reputation and hers, and sent them both off to America. His first American production was pretty poor. This was *Rosita*. He had not at that time a firm grasp on American production conditions and one feels that he did not sympathize very fully with the screen personality of Mary Pickford, which she was obviously forced to maintain whether Lubitsch wanted her to or not. There were things in the pictures which were good, but on the whole it was torn in two halves by the disharmony between the star and the director. His next American picture was a triumph. This was *The Marriage Circle*. By

this time Lubitsch had got a grasp of the American studio and found his feet in domestic comedy rather on the lines that James Cruze follows, but sophisticated where Cruze is homely, and with Continental flavour which even to this day seems only pseudo-continental. That is to say, he was forced to choose American stars who had no knowledge at all of the atmosphere he himself wished to create and so he wisely drew a picture of continental life which resembled what people suppose Vienna and Paris to be more closely than it did in reality.

Another happy quality of this clever director's is his ability to strip his story of all unessentials and to make each small incident carry along the development of character and the development of the story at the same time. The scenarios he uses are perfect and give to his pictures a smoothness and grace all too rare on the screen. There is of course another side to this. His pictures tend to become rather superficial, rather too much like Pinero. In *Three Women* he was more melodramatic. In *Forbidden Paradise* he was, as I have already said, perfect, both in picture making, in satire, and dramatically. His next picture, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, because of its extraordinarily outdated, artificial and weak story, was anything but suitable material for this extremely modern person to handle (also the theme of the sinful mother sacrificing herself for the pure daughter is so threadbare that it was almost impossible to believe that even Lubitsch could

have made it as fresh as he did.) Then he was burdened with Bert Lytell as Lord Windermere. It is not that an English lord could not have looked like Lytell, but that Lytell was so anxious to be doing the right lordly things, instead of being a character, that he made one rather conscious of his American accent. Lubitsch also, perhaps not knowing England, did not bring his satirical gifts, as he might have done with so much effect, to bear on the artificial story. The film was as heavy and as flat as a cold pancake, though no doubt it may be successful because of Wilde's name. It almost looks to me as though Lubitsch was following the director's curve ; that is to say, that like Griffith he has had his first early flowering, is drooping temporarily and we must wait a little until a fresh flood of enthusiasm sweeps him up again into a creative mood. *Lady Windermere's Fan* was merely a repetition of a repetition of his best American work.

Seastrom, the Swedish director, is a man whom America has nearly ruined. In Sweden, one cannot help feeling, the cinema has steered its own sweet course irrespective of a desire to please the people at all costs. Therefore, it has been possible for men in Sweden to experiment, to try to get thought, imagination, fancy, emotion-provoking scenes on to the screen. There has been much poetry and a great deal of fancy in Swedish films.

Seastrom became famous even among those who had never seen his pictures and eventually

he hired himself out to America. There this perhaps rather too artistic person was given stories by Hall Caine to direct, stories which should have been handled by a man like Rex Ingram who understands the handling of crowds, understands the kind of climaxes which popular stories need. Seastrom showed no peculiar ability at all ; he has always been given the wrong kind of work (*Confessions of a Queen* and *Name the Man*), and I feel sure had he been allowed to handle any one of the many films portraying country life in America, films about pioneers or about small towns or about farmers : if he had been given something like *Wanderer of the Waste Land* or *So Big* to direct, he would have done very much better than he has with the material given to him. He has a genius for the rural.* In *The Tower of Lies* he has redeemed himself on exactly these lines. Also witness the love scene in *He Who Gets Slapped*, the only really attractive part in that rather tedious picture.

Joseph von Sternberg came up like the Evening Star and went down like a meteor. It was he who made *The Salvation Hunters*, a film about derelict humanity at the wharfside. It certainly achieved a peculiar effect by practically eliminating all movement on the part of the actors, who leant against sewers and what appeared to be houses of ill fame, looking extremely depressed. The story, such as it was, was told in sub-titles ; the photography was interesting.

* One awaits *The Scarlet Letter* eagerly

There was something rather fresh and indeed, one must admit, almost successful about this film. Chaplin, one heard, hailed the picture as a masterpiece. When Chaplin opens his mouth, all the critics yap in unison. *The Salvation Hunters* was acclaimed throughout the world. It was a dismal failure. When it had gone its rounds, Chaplin said that he had thought he would see whether the cinema audiences had any sense. He thought he would praise a bad picture and see how many would swallow what he said. In fact he must have made a good many critics laugh on the wrong side of their faces, which was very naughty of him, but no doubt salutary for them.

Mr. von Sternberg was given another picture to direct, but so far as is known nothing came of this.

I am not an admirer of Mr. Cecil B. de Mille, though I will admit that he has a perfect genius for vulgarity in every sense of the word. I do not mean that his pictures are always unpleasant—far from it! Many of them are so moral that they might make even a Presbyterian minister feel like abandoning the paths of righteousness. Mr. de Mille obviously likes toying with the Infinite. *The Ten Commandments* is his wash-pot, and over *Reincarnation* he has cast out his shoe. I shall never feel the same either about the decalogue or about reincarnation now that I have seen what Mr. de Mille has done with them. There are those, I know, who contend that because Mr. de Mille, however bad they may be, shows

his pictures so smartly, keeps them moving so brightly, that people cannot leave the cinema while they are being shown, however angry they make them, he is therefore a good director. But frankly I do not believe it. I think his is the kind of picture which grips the eye at the moment, but which on reflection (and I believe that nearly everyone does reflect a little after seeing a picture) one is bound to shrug off as silly because his psychological values, even in their own convention, are false, and there is so little real reason why any of his characters should do anything that they do. So afterwards one feels that one has been sold. This, I contend, brings the whole cinema into contempt.

Nor am I wholly a passionate admirer of Mr. Fritz Lang, who has been acclaimed for his work on the *Nibelungs*. He has a great pictorial talent—he was a painter originally—but very little dramatic feeling. I think if the public did not like the *Nibelungs* that they were perfectly entitled not to do so. It is not sufficient for pictures to be pretty. They must also be exciting—either they must excite the sense of humour or one's curiosity about human nature, or they must show you interesting things happening, and on the whole I do not feel that Fritz Lang has the capacity to manage any of these things. Perhaps I am prejudiced through having seen his continuation, called *Kriemhild's Revenge*, but, with the instinct for a saleable title, called *The She-Devil* in England. And this was an awful picture.

It was dark, dull, boring, bad, and even funny unintentionally. I hear it made money but if that is true then one does begin to despair and believe that all that is necessary is for a film to have a good title, plenty of publicity and to be about something that happened years ago and which nobody understands.

On the other hand, I must admit that I very much admire *Destiny*, Lang's earlier picture. This was a revelation of the seriousness and beauty that might come to the cinema if there were a demand for it. It was not essentially cinematic. It was rather slow, but it had a magnificent theme. It was ravishing to look at and it achieved on the screen all that Reinhardt has been able to do for the theatre. But with all respect and admiration for Fritz Lang, I cannot help feeling that Murnau and E. A. Dupont are far nearer what is wanted than he. The first made *The Last Laugh*, the second *Vaudeville*.

No picture maker, I would interject, need really be incorrigible. Mr. Herbert Wilcox, for instance, made some awful pictures when he began. He had two faults, of which the most obvious was the one common in England, of using the screen as though it were a stage with exits left and right, the actors free to move only across a circumscribed oblong area, with a low skyline and the movements all parallel to the plane of the screen, not, as they should be, for the sake of depth-illusion, at angles to it.

Mr. Wilcox's early pictures like *Chu Chin*

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Chow and *Decameron Nights* were bad, or rather, they were amateurish. He was lost in the intricacies of the film studio, and improvised a story on to the colourless screen as best he could.

Another fault, less obvious, was his fear of dramatic climax. He is English and doesn't like a "scene." This was peculiarly noticeable in *The Only Way*, where, again and again, the interest he had worked up collapsed suddenly because he could not centre the emotion. In part this came of inexperience, in part it may be temperamental, but chiefly it came through a faulty scenario.

However, in making *Nell Gwyn*, Mr. Wilcox has to some extent got over his stagelike treatment of the screen: the picture had some real cinematic movement. Even here the soft pedal was put on the emotional crises rather too severely, but the picture *had* feeling, nevertheless, and with the assistance of an able American camera man and Miss Dorothy Gish as his star (she knows a lot about making pictures), *Nell Gwyn* turned out, not merely a very creditable British film, but an enjoyable, lively picture, of a scrappy and plotless variety, but rich in character and humanity.

Mr. Graham Cutts is another British picture-maker, very definitely not of the sheep and water school. He knows, and very rightly, what American jazz films are like, and though he does not make American pictures (an impossible task considering his anchorage here) he makes smart,

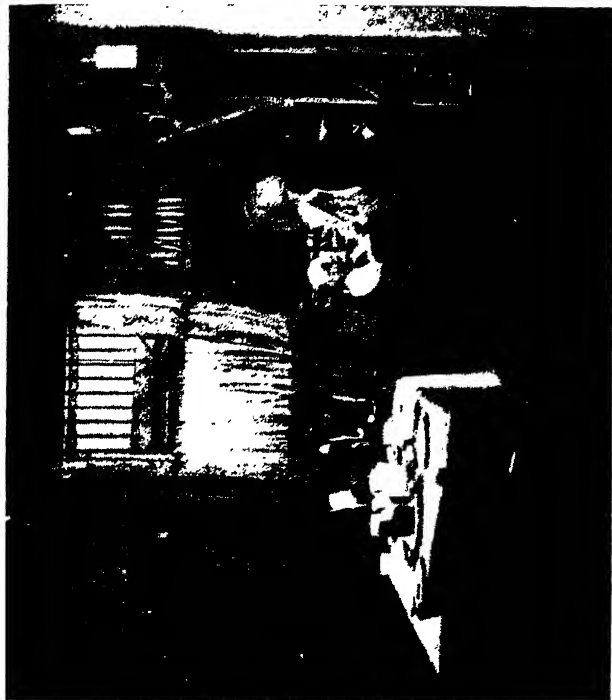
English pictures which prosper. In many ways *The Rat* and *The Blackguard* were influenced by Germany as far as the camera work went, and even some of the treatment, and they were certainly above the general British level. Given the opportunity Mr. Cutts might make a film like, and as good as, *Scaramouche*. He understands the art of timing his incidents much better than anyone else in England, though he suffers from a severe cabaret complex and tends to be prejudiced by a rather elementary notion of how to infuse sex into his pictures. The night club and boudoir are not the only ways. His horizon needs broadening, and then his ability and sure-fire punch could carry him very far.

During the past year there have been signs of new vitality in English film studios. Here and there it has been realized that by combining the efficiency and effervescence of the Americans and the inventive earnestness of the Germans—though without adopting the mechanical qualities of the one or the heavy spirit of the other—a new school of pictures might arise here. They would be typically English—full of bonhomie and engaging irresponsibilities and imagination.

Mr. Alfred Hitchcock, a new director, is already obviously a promising recruit for the future. His first film, *The Pleasure Garden*, though saddled with a crude and tasteless story, had an adult air, was often gracious to the eyes and sometimes to the fancy. His second, *The Lodger*, was a positive shock, so unlike anything

else it proved. Opening on a huge close-up of a woman's face, screaming with terror, it flicks in picture after picture, oddly without scrappiness—listeners-in, news editors, paper-boys receiving and conveying the news of a murder. The principal character, a pale, distraught young man, enters late in the development of the murder mystery. The camera casts continual suspicion on him, peers at him in sinister fashion, dogs him, registers flashes of his stealthy exits and entrances. All this is excellent, stimulating, evocative of imagination.

Not only, however, from this newcomer have welcome films lately emanated. Mr. Maurice Elvey—only yesterday a seemingly incorrigible die-hard—has burst forth resplendent with the simple, heartfelt *Mademoiselle from Armentieres*. There is at last a breath of intelligent animation and lively purpose about the English studios: and bright ideas, long banished therefrom, are coming into fashion. Good things, perhaps even great things, will come of this.



Scene from *The Lodger*, a brilliant English film directed by
Alfred Hitchcock

CHAPTER XIII

Speaking of International . . .

The national character of films—The finger print of England—Of France: with a note on some Clever Young Men—What Germany contributes.

Speaking of International . . .

WE are always being told that the cinema is international : like music or eggs. It is true that films are no respecters of frontiers. You may see Harold Lloyd in Pekin, Sydney, Salzburg, Paris or South America ; Emil Jannings in Tokio or Atlanta. But films are not international. There is no mistaking an English film for an American one, or an American film for a German, and Swedish films are easily detectable, though few and far between. Shall I say that American films are slick and speedy, English films pedestrian, German films ponderous, Swedish films severe, French films blustering ? Even when an American film is made in Italy it remains American, or when it is made in the States with a German director, French photographer and a Babel of actors, it is always an American film. English film companies have gone to Germany and made pictures in German studios with largely German casts and remained typically humanist and English. Was *Madame Sans Gene* a French film, though it was made in France with a French marquise (by marriage) as the famous washerlady ? Not a bit !

In talking of the cinema it is always necessary to hail Columbia, whatever it is, because America has made her washpot of the movies. " Ah," the well-informed person will interject, " but her

supremacy has been challenged. Germany has wrested the laurels from her, not for the worst but for the best films." Well, we shall see.

An English film director (blessings on him !) said to me not a twelvemonth ago that if you really wanted to tickle your audience, really get them, you needed to do two things, and two things only. You had to give them sheep. You had to give them running water. Now this Rip Van Winkle of a film director (whom the angels support !) was talking of the dear dead days of some ten to fifteen "bigger and better" movie seasons past. That was the time, and well I remember it, when, because the little boy next door had a father who was a violinist, I used to attend matinées at a delectable place called "Waller Jeffs' Pictures," situated in a steep street in the centre of one of the most important of our English manufacturing towns. I think the little boy's father was a violinist at "Waller Jeffs' Pictures," otherwise I don't know how we came to go there. But I know we walked a mile to the station and rode all excited to town and went into the darkness to wonder and cry "Oo" at jiggling photographs (far better than the magic lantern we had once loved so dearly despite its smell), that not only showed you things, but showed them moving. Alas, my memory is bad and all I can recollect is of express trains with huge cow-catchers in front of them, rushing and snorting towards one, and of Indians on piebald ponies who rode, all feathers and

eyes, down through the prairies, though I forget who they were chasing. I don't even know when this was : after the General Election of 1906 certainly, and equally certainly before the death of King Edward in 1910, because we were only neighbours of that musically-fathered boy for a little while between those two important dates in my life : important I mean because I remember the heated Conservative versus Liberal conversations in 1906 which took place on the old horse-omnibus which took us every morning into the town to school, and because I remember when the news of King Edward's death came I was at another school in Belgium, and we all cried.

By 1911-12, when the cinema was once more open to me, things had changed. There were real picture houses by then, and real pictures with stories in them—Italian ones in which opulently built and black-eyed ladies gesticulated violently against a background of highly ornate wallpaper. There were French films too, and a funny man called Max Linder ; American films about wicked men who reformed and ladies in the puffed hair and long skirts of that era. There were also English films, as good as any and very nice too, about rustics. Then it was that the sheep and water school flourished.

We are an agricultural race in exile : rich or poor, our grandfathers came from the soil, whether squire or tenant. This perhaps accounts for the still lingering love of the conservative

lower classes and still more conservative Royal Academy for sheep and cows in the twilight. Now, if sheep in oil paint, sheep in chromolithography or pseudo-engravings are sweet, sheep which really move in a photograph with the light wavering on their soft backs must be still sweeter. The same rule applies to waterfalls and streams and the old mill-wheel. But, alas, our grandfathers lie under decent marble or turf, and the day of the sheep is over. This, however, with few exceptions and these only recent ones, the British makers of films (like many of the older Academicians) have not realized.

It was Hepworth of course who carried the ovine tradition to its zenith. As late as 1921 he produced, with a flourish of trumpets, a picture rather typically called *Comin' thro' the Rye*, in which a star rôle was played by a field in which the rye, as far as I remember, failed to function obediently. The picture had to be finished without the rural accompaniment desired. It was a most awful film. The photography was sooty and hard, the actors moved as though they were on a horizontal stage, not (as it should be in the cinema) in a free orbit. The leading lady, Miss Alma Taylor, eschewed the use of make-up and looked peculiarly swarthy. The story was treated in a pompous, lumbering way which ground out every note of pathos inherent in the novel on which it was based. It was clean, of course, clean as a clothes-horse and about as

inspiring. It was as British as Birket Foster. It was unendurable.

Incidentally it, and some of the Stoll Company's product, pretty nearly killed all British films, for it appeared during British film week, and there was a sort of patriotic compulsion on cinema owners to show it. The public groaned aloud.

Oddly enough, however, still British film companies go on making pictures in the same dreary tradition. The Stoll Picture Company does. The Edwardian tradition hovers over Cricklewood quite often in fact: the diehards gather together there, those who believe in "clean" pictures, smudgy, dull photography, solid, all-British heroines, and impossible plots. None of the people concerned can ever have been in a picture theatre for ten years, or they would know differently and not continue good-hearted attempts to make the public dance the valeta when it much prefers the foxtrot.

France, alas, once a pioneer, is—like England until quite lately—in a rut. Her picture-makers are still working in an outworn mode, her actors still fling themselves about or stand stock-still like people in stage melodramas. Her photography is unsympathetic. *Salamambo*, a recent spectacular film, was dreadful—incoherent, stiff, exaggerated and silly. It was no advance on French spectacular films of ten years ago. Italy is in much the same case though a natural aptitude for spectacle and for large

architectural sets seething with naturally animated mobs, still stands her in good stead. But it is a fault in even Italy's best pictures that they merely let the audience look on at the action ; they never give the illusion that one is participating in it.

There are, however, in Paris, quantities of clever people who have heard, or invented, that the cinema is Art ; who have occupied themselves and spent their pocket money in making "arty" little films. The most typical is the one known under the title of *A quoi revent les jeunes films*, made by Comte Etienne de Beaumont, with static photographs and swarthy society ladies and a jumble of photographs of cigarette smoke, ballet dancers' feet seen through glass from below, cotton wool and district railway trains going at about a thousand miles an hour. Amusing for a moment, the film soon wearies. Other films of the same kind were *Entr'acte*, which was perhaps less wearying because it had a slight fantastic story of a tragic death, a preposterous funeral taken alternately in quick and slow motion. "Amusing" in the slang sense as these pictures may be, original as they are, I am confident that there is no future whatsoever for films of this kind. That is to say, for films which merely aim at a rhythmical succession of either static objects or of objects in motion. It is true that the eye is forced to look at what moves, but unless something is going to happen through the motion, unless in fact

there is a story value, the eye very quickly tires. The use of films of this kind has best been understood in Germany (for they order these things better in Germany). Pattern films of this kind have been used as an integral part of original dramatic films ; that is to say, the old touch of making lamp-posts reel when drunkards totter has been applied to serious drama. For instance, in the *Nibelungs*, a pure pattern film was used to tell the audience of the symbolic dream which warned Kriemhild of the impending tragedy. The film was made by Mr. Walter Ruttmann, who is well known in Berlin for the clever advertising films he has made. These are rather like the posters of McKnight Kauffer, but they move and whirl instead of remaining eternal and fixed.

Of course, everyone will agree that it is absolutely essential that the camera should be given full rein ; that it should be allowed to play with the subject matter it photographs. But I am absolutely confident that the clever young people in Paris are making a very great mistake when they fancy that the camera can play for its own amusement alone. Every little movement must have a meaning of its own ; this haphazard photography of hundreds of weird objects can lead to nothing and can achieve nothing—except some kind of visual rhythm—even though it be done with perfect taste and with accompaniments specially written by musically minded co-operators.

There is a lady called Gertrude Stein, who writes books composed entirely of words ; meaning is a thing she avoids. She has her enthusiasts who contend, quite rightly, that writers must make patterns in words, that old words must be pressed to new meanings, but she is not literature, or rather, not in the stream of literature, though it might be held that she is a small sparkling rivulet. She is, in fact, in the same case as the abstract films from Paris, which equally scrupulously avoid meaning.

And now to Germany !

I am perfectly well aware that in one respect German films are failures. *Destiny* and *The Last Laugh*, *The Waltz Dream* and *Cinderella*, were not what could be called box-office attractions by a long and bitter way. No one would attempt to deny that the Germans make films which are too heavy, too serious, too slow, too gloomy for the general cinema audience. As a matter of fact tragedy is the rarest thing on the screen, apart from the Germans.

But gloomy and sick at soul as were the German films of the past, they were an important contribution to the development of the cinema, the most important, in fact, since the now decadent D. W. Griffith first took up the megaphone.

They have, first of all, inaugurated a new kind of photography. They have established that an object which the eye has to seek is more interesting *per se* than one which jumps at the pupil nakedly.

Now, when making murder mysteries, the Americans had naturally used darkness, through which menacing hands, pistol barrels and eyes loomed. It was perhaps in part accidental and due to a love of macabre plots that the Germans made so much use of darkness, but use it they did. Where the Americans photograph in clear blacks and bright whites on a silver background, the Germans photograph in all the half-tones on a dull black background. They pick out from darkness, that is, what they wish to be seen. The Americans generally show you everything except the plain faces of some of their stars, which they always photograph charitably through gauze. It is generally true that shade preponderates in Germany and light in America, though pictures now rush about the world so much that lively-minded directors snap up tricks of other countries and lively producers snap up foreign directors and cameramen, until any innovation tends to be applied universally.

But the Germans did more with their camera than that. They were not the first, I admit, to use travelling cameras, but they certainly were the first to use them, not merely to show one round a room, but to follow up an emotion, to let one penetrate *into* the picture and into the feelings of the actors in a picture. One of the advantages of the travelling camera is of course that it does away with jerky transitions from long shot to middle distance to close-up. But

the increased intimacy given by it is even more important. The Germans were the first to recognize that the camera is the door through which the cinema audience travels into the world of pictures. It is they who have discovered that cinematography is not merely moving photography—a band of photographs sliding past. It would hardly be art were this so. They noticed that besides this continuous melting of scene into scene there is another abstract movement—another dimension—from the central forms inwards and outwards. They use the Germans make of the long vista—the alley or avenue obliquely inclined, along and across which crowds pass, defines the planes of motion and gives an architectural weight to the pictorial composition.

The plots of all German films are relatively simple—the short story rather than the novel. This gives them scope for acting, of course. And the Germans were wise in their day. They put themselves on the cinema map with films that were as good as they could make them—that is to say, not apeing the Americans but attempting to bring to the cinema all their diversified talents in a way which, because it was novel, would arrest universal attention. It did. Cinema proprietors execrated German films. *Warning Shadows* was detested by audiences reared on Nita Naldi and Lewis Stone. On the other hand, the smaller cinema audience which likes to-day what everyone accepts to-morrow, and the intelligent people

in the film trade all over the world, saw something new had come upon the cinema, and for good. A partial, box office attracting retrogression has now set in in Germany but the Germans have left their mark. *Caligari* did not bloom unseen. And if the ordinary German films are as bad as average English pictures, the best German pictures have taught America a lesson—that the cinema is a living, growing thing, not a rigid form of entertainment in which every trick and ingredient is known. The best, in fact, is yet to be.

During the war and up till about 1923, while Germany was completely cut off from the rest of the world, it still had its cinema palaces to provide for. I do not know if the German Government takes so serious a view of the function of the cinema in helping to maintain order as the Japanese Government does. One of the first acts of the Japanese Government after the earthquake and floods at Tokio was to arrange for the immediate repair and re-opening of the picture palaces. It saw in the cinema an immediate sedative for the agitated crowds of homeless and half-ruined people : and its wisdom and promptitude cannot but have had excellent effects on the general morale.

But whether or no the German Government felt rather the same during the blockade, the defeat, and the occupation of their country, at any rate the German picture houses did not close. The Germans began extensively making

films of their own. There existed already a nucleus of talent upon which the producers wisely called. I mean the actors, designers and managers of Reinhardt's old theatre and of other important theatrical groups as well. The German theatre, with its talent for crowd-handling and new forms of stage designs and effects, its expressionistic manner of acting, was fortunately easily able to adapt itself to the cinema. Possibly because they had not the means, or possibly because it never occurred to them, they did not begin "adapting" the plots of novels and stage-plays, but generally had straight scenarios written intended solely for cinematography. The degree of intelligence among German film producers must be at least double that of any others. They knew how to choose suitable themes and they knew how to put them into pictures. As they couldn't know how other countries were evolving their various technique, they simply went straight along and did whatever seemed to them best. Of the results, some dozen of their best post-war pictures have been seen in America, and, later, in England. The German pictures fall into two groups: one (including *Caligari*, *Destiny*, *The Street*, *Warning Shadows*, *Raskolnikoff*, *Nibelungs* and *The Golem*) remarkable chiefly for the amazing originality of the subjects handled and the ever more startling originality with which they were treated: the other (including Pola Negri's early films, Emil Jannings' films, *The Ancient*

Law) in which the acting was notable, and also the atmosphere. In all there was a remarkable "feeling for the cinema."

I do not pretend to know how these films ever got shown in America, France and England, for it is not so long ago that Wagner was still a particularly black *bête noir*, at least here. It was one of those happy miracles that do occur, simply. Without much explanation, with no country of origin being stated, with the actors' names not given, the dozen films mentioned above were quietly put on, first, as I say, in U.S.A., then in Paris and later over here. What the public at first thought of them I do not know. But I do know what the American producers thought. They were flabbergasted.

I wish someone with a ready pen could have witnessed the expression and recorded the utterance of some half-dozen of the most intelligent of the Americans when they first saw *Sumurun* and *Caligari*. It must have been like Keats first opening Chapman's Homer, and much more. I daresay Chaplin, who is obviously much the most intelligent and impressionable of them, could really have told one something. I do not for one moment suggest that Mr. Cecil de Mille or Mr. Fox were even capable of seeing anything in German films. I don't think they have ever seen anything in Griffith, except a "box-office proposition." But the *best* of the American directors . . . how excited they must have been over them. With apologies for so

covering Chaplin with bouquets, he obviously drank the new inspiration in gladly. There are many signs that he has enjoyed and appreciated and understood German films in his delightful *Woman of Paris*.

Whichever of the Americans did or did not see the implication of these new strange pictures, the idea certainly got about that they were "clever" and "new." It is a strange thing how much men, and rich business men particularly, and big business men in the amusement world most of all, are dazzled by what they hear people call "art." No housemaid sighs for pearls and ermine bedspreads more passionately than such men pant after "art." And in the amusements world, there is sometimes money in it, and always, what is more attractive still, there is *réclame* and prestige. The U.S. pictures of 1923 began to show traces of the German influence. And then Ernst Lubitsch who had "made" Miss Negri, was imported into the States to direct for U.S. film corporations. He came a partial cropper with *Rosita* : but there were moments of sheer visual beauty in it (generally when Pickford was not about) which are worth a good deal : the choirboys in the Cathedral were grouped in a divine way. Pola Negri was enticed to the States too. Buchovetski, another director, followed. Victor Seastrom, who had made Swedish pictures famous before Germany had begun its work (and too good to be popular) went last and they had the idiocy to put him to

turning one of Hall Caine's intensely stupid stories into moving pictures. He did the best he could and played about a bit with the Yankee studio devices. Chaplin turned in his brilliant *Woman of Paris*. So much for the Germanization of American films—all very difficult to trace in its results, but all most important.

Meanwhile 1923 also saw the arrival after so long of American films in Germany. The public went mad over them. And at the moment Germany with its glorious studios, immense talent and intelligence, is doing its best to make quite American films. American and English stars are being bought, subjects likely to please American and English cinemas are being handled. I believe, however, that nothing can really eclipse the German brilliance for long.

CHAPTER XIV

A Dialogue of Two Sober Men :
As though Plato and Aristotle

A Dialogue of Two Sober Men : As though Plato and Aristotle

ARISTOTLE : But if we were to form our opinions upon this medium from the examples that have been set before us and try to decide on such evidence whether, in the profoundest sense, we can expect from it a new mode of art, I think we might well be reduced to despair. For in these days the many are apt to take the spectacular and the amazing for the beautiful, and they demand not a purge for the emotions but an emotional debauch. And who among the practitioners in this kind can swear that he gives no thought to the preferences of the many but devotes himself wholly to producing a work which shall have the properties of greatness of conception, expression of truth, and faithfulness to the essential nature of life ? I have no doubt that there are some amongst them who would swear anything and are impudent enough to make public protestations that they are men who have no other interest than beauty. May God deal with them as they deserve ! But worse than this, if we look at the trend of affairs and observe, on the one hand, how power is given more and more to men who are not notable for any service to the State, but rather for loquacity or for the cunning

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to acquire money for themselves or for concurrence in vulgar opinions, and, on the other hand, how the standards of art and of life are set by the ignorant and slavish, and any man, no matter how thoughtless or undisciplined he may be, counts himself worthy to deliver a judgment upon the deepest questions, so that we may say that the magnanimous man and the gentleman have well-nigh disappeared from the earth—if we consider all these things, it may happen that we shall despair not of this medium only but of all mediums and of man himself. Would it not be better, then, to confine our discussion to this medium as a pure form and refuse to be turned aside either by unhappy memories or by gloomy forebodings?

PLATO : You speak divinely, O Aristotle. But let us not forbid ourselves all mention of the material world, or else we shall be hard put to it to draw morals and to know to what use our efforts may be directed ; which would be evil indeed.

ARISTOTLE : Why, then, it appears to me that the form suffers from heavy disadvantages, and, first, in the fact that of all senses it appeals only to the eye. For the eye, though it may be called easy and drastic in its operations, yet is the least subtle in its effects. It takes in more impressions than any other sense and stores up less in the soul ; above all the rest, it creates the feeling that the world is multiple and full of insignificances. It may even be said of a work

of art that the most valuable presentation is not the one in which we have the appearance before us in substance but the presentation which may always occur in the mind, independently of times, of actors, and of physical stimulus. And who can assert that the whole significance of a film he has once seen is always with him, ready to be called up at will and revived in its full force ?

Nor can this objection be met by the instances of painting and sculpture. For here the eye has more opportunity to take in lasting impressions, both of the whole and of its parts. And, moreover, though the external sense by which these arts are appreciated is the eye, yet the interior senses are drawn to its aid ; as can be seen when a man speaks of the harmony in such works, or more particularly, when he finds that a statue affects him by means of his interior sense of touch ; of balance, weight, stability, smoothness and the like. But in a film the impressions are casual and fleeting ; and there is little call for any appreciation but that proper to the eye itself.

PLATO : To which I would add, if it is allowed me, that it is by this interior sense of harmony and by no other sense that the soul is most forcibly worked upon. For the soul itself is a harmony, or rather a cause of harmony ; and as we would tune a lyre whose strings gave out wrong and unpleasing notes by comparing it with another whose notes were

true and pleasing, or perhaps, if we were expert, by an ideal lyre which existed only in the mind, so the soul itself can be attuned well and truly by comparison with other harmonies or causes of harmony. But in this case there is a strange difference ; for the soul responds as though by itself to the harmonies of art ; it moves and is moved by music. But perhaps my argument seems far-fetched and unpersuasive to you, Aristotle.

ARISTOTLE : I incline to your opinion, Plato, though I think I could improve upon your argument. Still, since we are not debating, as sophists debate, for the pleasure of seeming to get the better of each other, but are eagerly enquiring of our minds to see what they can tell us of the subject, I shall gladly hear more of your thought without criticism or quibble.

PLATO : Your words are gracious, Aristotle. And I think we have chosen the likeliest way to come by the truth. I was anxious to say that those critics who speak of the rhythm of motion in films have some kind of insight into our problem, though I am very sure that none of them has explored it to the end. It is indeed possible that what is lost by the temporary nature of the images may in some measure be retrieved by a harmony of relations between them, and I can conceive (though with difficulty) a work in this kind which should build up a harmony of motions at once energetic and

healing. Before this, however, I think we might hope for some harmony of the characters and the incidents.

ARISTOTLE : And here I believe that we have come to another disadvantage ; for an army of men is needed to produce a film ; and this not only for the execution but for the conception itself. How, then, can we expect them to play in unison—to wish to express the same thing and to be driven by the same impulse ? And if one inspiration should in fact occupy all of them, how could it be other than a vague and turbid inspiration, without the purity or distinctness of art ? For when men object to the film that there is too much mechanism about it for art, they really mean nothing of the sort, or they would be compelled to object to the sculptor's chisel and the painter's brush, and still more to the printing of books. But they see, however dimly, that the intermediaries in the production of a film are more than executants ; they must change and divert the original conception, each interpreting it in his own fashion. And, even if it should happen that a film should be conceived and directed and produced by one man alone, and that he should put the whole of his nature into his work and be able to make the actors understand him perfectly and the other executants conform to his vision, even in such a case we could not expect his work to have the unity that we find in a work where the expression is direct

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and immediate, and there is no such multiplicity of means.

PLATO : Let us not be too exacting, however ; for I think that you have struck upon the method by which this medium could best serve the purposes of art, whether in itself and as a pure form it is to be considered noble or the reverse. And there is perhaps something absurd in discussing a form apart from its uses, and dismissing it from consideration because it is not the most admirable form that we can imagine. We may consider the question in this fashion, that here we have an instrument for expression which may be used up to its limitations ; and to grieve over its limitations instead of attempting to fulfil its capacities would be stupid in the extreme.

ARISTOTLE : Suppose we admit, therefore, that the best use to which this medium may be turned—apart from instruction and the recording of manners, customs, events and the like, which things are useful in themselves but not to be reckoned in the province of art—is to produce beautiful works ; not works which seem beautiful to those whose tastes are luxurious, such as slaves and tyrants, but works which the producer has made beautiful, as far as he could, in accordance with his own highest conception of beauty, exerting every effort both to conceive nobly and to execute without shortcomings. Now it cannot be true that beauty is one thing in this medium and quite

another in music, sculpture and poetry, or that the beauties of all these arts are completely separate and have nothing in common. For, if it were so, we could have no recognition of beauty in them all, but we should need quite different words for each one of them. It would better be said that beauty is the same in all of them, but that each expresses beauty in aspects peculiar to itself. From this we may conclude that two things are necessary for the producer of a good film. He must have spent much time in the contemplation of what beauty is in itself, and must be familiar with works of beauty in all its aspects, so that he possesses a real comprehension of beauty and a real love for beautiful things. And at the same time he must have a natural sense for the methods of his own art, and know them utterly, and express himself best in these terms ; since it would be foolish to expect a musician to produce a good film merely through his appreciation of beauty. But, while both of these are necessary, it is obviously the knowledge of beauty in itself which is furthest to seek in our own time. For which reason, if I had my own way, I should compel all the producers of films in the world to come together and should try to force them to consider these things seriously and to beat into their heads a due reverence for their own medium. Or, as this would seem impossible, I should pray heaven to send all kinds of plagues amongst them, till not one remained

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alive. For in that case there might be hopes that men who were not wholly ignoble would be found to take their place.

PLATO : O Aristotle, you are younger than I by far, and as yet more given to violent speech. Perhaps, also, you are inclined to expect more from the men around you and to be more disappointed by what you see. As for myself, I wish no misfortunes to befall the producers of films ; for their faults spring from ignorance and not from wickedness. I am well assured that many of them would prove to be of amiable character, gentle with children and responding gratefully to good words.

THE END

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Appendix

GLOSSARY OF ENGLISH TERMS AND REFERENCES

Note.—The following films mentioned in this book are not well-known in America, and, if at all, have been shown chiefly by the small "highbrow" movie theatres and societies:—

COSTER BILL	MOROSCO.	POLIKUSHKA.
OF PARIS.	NJU.	WARNING
THE GOLEM.	PEARLS AND	SHADOWS.
KEAN.	SAVAGES.	THE WAXWORKS.
THE STREET.	SUMURUN.	WITH COBHAM TO THE CAPE.

The film frequently referred to in the book under the name of "Vaudeville" was shown in America under the title "Variety."

A.

ACADEMICIANS.	Members of the Royal Academy, q.v.
ACADEMY, THE	The Royal Academy. A Society of well-known but generally mediocre painters.
<i>Adelphi, The</i>	An esoteric monthly literary magazine, published in London.
AMUSING.	As a slang term, this word has been widely adopted in England to avoid the cliché "interesting." It is applied to any person or thing found to be agreeable.
AQUARIUM.	Here (page 143) a fine new building recently added to the London Zoo.
BACK CHAT.	Wise cracking.
BAYSWATER.	An eminently respectable district in the North-West of London.
BIRKETT	An Academician of the older generation ;
FORSTER.	synonymous with all that is most characteristic of the more academic

B.

	side of English water-colour painting of the late Victorian period.
BLACKPOOL.	A seaside resort near Liverpool. A sort of Coney Island.
BLOKE,	Boy friend.
REGULAR.	
BOWLER.	Derby hat.
BRINGING	Bringing this about, putting this across
THIS OFF.	or over, carrying this off.
BRITISH	Here used (page 88) in reference to the
MUSEUM.	library which this Institution contains: as who should say the Public Library, in New York.
BUBBLY.	Old-fashioned slang term for Champagne.

C.

CECIL, THE.	A large hotel in London; corresponds roughly to the Belmont, in New York.
CHARING CROSS	A street in the centre of London.
ROAD.	
CHEMIST.	Druggist.
CIGARETTE ENDS.	Cigarette Butts.
CINEMA.	Movies.
CINEMA-GOER.	Movie-goer.
CINEMA-	Movie photography; the art or science
TOGRAPHY.	or technique of the movies.
CIVIL SERVANTS.	Government employés.
CLARKSON.	The famous London costumier and wig maker. Corresponds to Eaves in New York.
COLISEUM.	The principal vaudeville theatre in London.
<i>College Days.</i>	Name of a film known in America as "The Freshman."
COUNTY	Members of the London County Council,
COUNCILLORS.	the City's governing body.
CRICKLEWOOD.	A suburb of London in which the Stoll film studios are situated.
CRITERION, THE	A London Theatre, associated with productions of light comedies.

CROPPER,
TO COME A

Properly a hunting term meaning to fall headlong. It implies failure. Hence we should say here (page 252): "He fell down rather badly with *Rosita*." Colloquially it also means to put one's foot in it, to get oneself into a pickle, to fall foul of something.

D.

- Daily Mirror*. A London newspaper composed largely of pictures; corresponds to the *Tabloids* in America.
- DAIMLER. Name of an English automobile; corresponds to the Pierce-Arrow in America.
- DERBY. The Derby Race; great popular horse-racing event held annually on Epsom Downs, near London.
- Destiny*. Name of a film shown in America under the title of "Between Worlds"
- DOUGLAS. A seaside resort in the Isle of Man.
- DRURY LANE. Name of a large London theatre; associated with productions of melodrama.
- DUMB DOLL. Dumb Dora.

E.

- EAST LONDON. The poorer part of London.
- ELEPHANT AND CASTLE. Name of a theatre in a squalid region on the south side of London, dominated by a famous public-house or saloon of the same name. This theatre is one of the last strongholds of transpontine melodrama. The surrounding region also takes its name from the saloon.
- EUSTON. A dreary district in the north of London.
- EVERYMAN, THE. A little highbrow theatre in Hampstead—an elevated suburb of London.

F.

- FILM SOCIETY.** A Society recently organized in London, and the prototype of the "Film Guild" in New York. It presents to its members on occasional Sunday afternoons revivals of good films now passed out of current distribution, new films of exceptional interest which commercial managers will not touch, and films which the censor will not pass for general distribution, but which because of the private nature of a membership society, the Film Society is able to present.
- FLAG-DAY COLLECTORS.** Tag-day collectors.
- FORSTER, BIRKETT.** (See Birkett Forster).
- FRIED FISH BUSINESS.** A stall or shop where fried fish and fresh fried potatoes (called "chips") are sold at certain hours, to be eaten on the spot or taken away in a piece of newspaper. Corresponds to a popcorn business in America, perhaps.

G.

- GAIETY, THE.** A London theatre associated with productions of musical comedy.
- GROCK.** A well-known Swiss clown.
- GUINEAS, TWENTY.** Twenty-one pounds sterling: about one hundred dollars.

H.

- HAMMERSMITH.** An inelegant suburb in the West of London.
- HAMPSTEAD.** A healthy village-suburb at the North of London, where the successful ex-intelligentsia prolong their lives.
- HEALS.** Manufacturers of modern furniture in London.

- H. AND C. An abbreviation from the advertisement columns: "Hot and cold running water."—English idea of the height of luxury.
- HOARDINGS. Bill boards.

J.

- JAM POTS. Jam jars.
- JERRY BUILDER. A constructor of cheap, flimsy and shoddy buildings.
- John o' London's Weekly.* A popular literary review published in London.
- JOLLY GOOD As who should say, "And a good thing, too."
- JOB.

K.

- KAUFFER,
McKNIGHT. A young American working in London; one of the most distinguished poster designers in Europe.

L.

- LIFT. Elevator.
- LLOYD, MARIE. A well-known English low comedienne, now dead.
- LYRIC, THE A pseudo-highbrow theatre in Hammer-smith, q.v.

M.

- MARBLE ARCH, A London movie theatre in Oxford
THE Street, on the edge of Bayswater, q.v.
- MARIE LLOYD. (See Lloyd, Marie).
- MARRIAGE Marriage certificate.
- LINES.
- MERSON, BILLY. A well-known English low comedian.
- MOON SHINES Sung to the tune of "Redwing." This
BRIGHT ON song never penetrated generally to
CHARLIE America.
- CHAPLIN, THE
- MUSIC HALLS. Vaudeville theatres.

N.

- NEW GALLERY, THE. A movie theatre in Regent Street, London.
 NINEPENNY. Adj. from ninepence. About eighteen cents.

O.

- OLYMPIA. A large enclosure in London where various forms of entertainments and exhibitions are held. Corresponds to Madison Square Garden in New York, and is commonly associated in England with the Circus.

P.

- PENNY-A-LINERS. Hack journalists.
 PHILHARMONIC HALL. A small concert hall in London, now chiefly used as a movie theatre.
 PICCADILLY. A principal thoroughfare of London. The reference here (page 37) is more particularly to Piccadilly Circus, London's version of Times Square.
 PICTURES, THE. Movies.
 PLAZA, THE. A new movie theatre in London, owned by the Famous Players Corporation.
 PROVINCES, THE. Any place in England outside of London.
 PROVINCIAL TOWNS. All English towns outside of Greater London.
 PUB. Colloquial abbreviation for Public-house. A saloon.

R.

- REGULAR (See Bloke, Regular).
 BLOKE.
 RUSHEY GREEN. An obscure suburb in the south of London.

S.

SAVOY, THE.	A large hotel in London. Corresponds roughly to the Biltmore, in New York.
SELL.	A cheat: "a snare and a delusion."
SHEPHERD'S BUSH.	An undistinguished suburb in the West of London.
SIX SEATER.	Six passenger automobile.
SOUTHEND.	A Cockney seaside resort to the east of London.
<i>Spectator</i> , THE.	A weekly political and literary review published in London.
SQUIFFY.	Tight, boiled, blind, stewed, pickled, drunk, etc.
STOP.	Here (page 178) used in the sense of stay: a common English locution.
SWEETS.	Candy.
SWITCHBACK RAILWAY.	Roller-coaster.

T.

TEA.	An informal meal consisting of tea with bread and butter or toast or buns, etc., and cake, partaken of by everybody in England every day at 4.30.
TIVOLI, THE.	A movie theatre situated in the Strand, in London.
TOFFEE.	A kind of candy; a cross between a caramel and a piece of taffy.
<i>Tons of Money</i> .	Name of one of those farces which run in London for years, and are subject to periodic revival.
TRAMS.	Street cars.
TUBES.	Subways.
TWELVEMONTH.	One year; a common English locution.
TWENTY GUINEAS.	(See "Guineas, Twenty.")
TYPIST.	Stenographer.

V.

<i>Vaudeville</i> .	Name of a film which was shown in America under the title, "Variety."
VICARAGE.	Parsonage.

W.

WALKING OUT.	Courting. A term used by servants.
WAR OFFICE, THE.	The War Department.
WEST END.	The fashionable, "smart," or "society" part of London.
WHITECHAPEL.	A district in the East of London, chiefly associated with the Jews. Corresponds to the Ghetto in New York.
WORTHING.	A blameless watering-place in Sussex, on the south coast of England, about sixty miles from London.

Z.

ZIP.	Pep.
------	------

3d.	Threepence : about six cents.
6d.	Sixpence : about twelve cents.
1s. 2d.	One shilling and twopence : about twenty-eight cents.
1s. 3d.	One shilling and threepence : about thirty cents.
£8,000.	Eight thousand pounds sterling : about forty thousand dollars.

